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DORCAS

DORCAS

The Daughter of Faustina

BY

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AUTHOR OF "ARIUS THE LIBYAN"

SAN FRANCISCO

JOHN HOWELL

1922

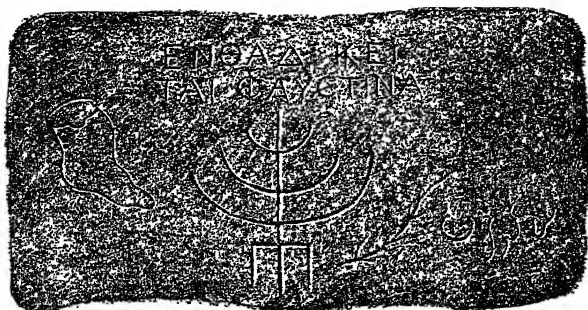
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PREFACE

IN the Catacombs of Rome is an ancient tomb wherein repose the mortal remains of some Christian martyr. A slab of white marble closes the little crypt cut out of the rock to be her sarcophagus, and upon this slab a careful, but unskilled hand hath cut an inscription that readeth after the fashion shown in this book; the English of which is, "Here lies Faustina. In peace." The name is Latin, the inscription is in the Greek tongue, the word Shalom or "Peace" is in Hebrew. The character in the lower middle portion of the slab indicates that she died a martyr to her faith, and the urn at the left is a symbol of Christian burial. Who was she? How died she? When?

Musing alone beside this last resting-place of one who died for Jesus centuries ago, my lamp flickered and expired; and then in the subterranean

darkness of the catacombs the dead forms around me seemed to live again, re-peopling the past in which they lived, and loved, and suffered, and what I beheld, as in a vision, I seek now to reproduce in this story of ANTI-CHRIST. Those of whom I learned it knew whereof they spoke, and the reader may rely upon the verity of all things that are set forth as facts.

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DORCAS

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DORCAS

DAUGHTER OF FAUSTINA

CHAPTER I

DORCAS, THE DAUGHTER OF FAUSTINA

IN the year 310, a villa stood upon the Appian Way in the suburbs of the City of Rome, which had been builded in the usual fashion of the better class of Roman houses of that period, and was owned and occupied by the Vice-Prefect Varus, whose command constituted a portion of the city guards, and was usually stationed near the Campus Martius. This man, a relative of that Varus who had been terribly defeated by the German barbarians in the forest of Teutoberg, in the days when Tiberius was emperor, and had fallen upon his own sword and died because of his mortification over that defeat, was a perfect type of the Roman officer, devoted to military life, thoroughly trained to his inhuman profession, and incapable of judging of the right or wrong of anything unless some military order or custom had first decided it. In other words, he knew

no sense of duty except to conform to military usages, and obey such orders as he might receive from his superiors; yet he was not narrow-minded, weak nor ignorant. He was, indeed, a man of large intelligence and of considerable literary attainments. He had served for many years in Italy and in foreign lands, and being beyond the meridian of life and somewhat disabled by honorable wounds, he had obtained a lucrative position in the legions stationed about the city, the duties of which were so light that he passed the greater portion of his time at the villa with his wife Calpha, his son Marcellus and the throng of domestic slaves usually found about an opulent Roman's house.

The house of Varus stood back a short distance from the splendid highway, and was surrounded by extensive grounds laid off in circles, rectangles and irregular forms, bordered with shrubs and flowers and cultivated in vineyards, orchards and gardens. Here and there amid the foliage of the trees gleamed numerous marble statues, the lovely Venus, the reeling Bacchus, the sovereign Jupiter, Silence, with marble finger on his marble lips, and numerous other deities.

The son of Varus was the model of a Roman youth, tall, agile, athletic and almost singularly handsome. In a short time he would be of age, and through his father's influence he had already

obtained an appointment as centurion to take effect upon the day that he should "burn his beard" and assume the virile toga.

The Vice-Prefect sat in the shade one day in front of his open portico, tracing words and figures with the point of his sword in the sand and gravel of the broad walk leading from the house to the highway, when up from the marble stile upon the road a tall and swarthy man approached, leading a young girl by the hand. So preoccupied was Varus that he did not notice their coming until the tall man's shadow fell upon the figure he was making in the sand, and upon raising his head to see whom his visitors might be, received a respectful salute, and the man said in the Greek language, then much used at Rome:

"Art thou the Vice-Prefect Varus?"

"Yea," answered Varus; "who art thou?"

"I am Epaphras, an Israelite, and the maiden is Dorcas, the daughter of Faustina, whom I have brought to thee because I heard in the city that thou desirest to employ a damsel who can read and speak the Greek and the Latin, and is not wholly uninstructed in the Hebrew tongue."

"Yea, yea!" cried the Vice-Prefect, his bronzed face lighting up with pleasure, "I greatly desire to hire such a girl, and will pay liberally for her services. We have four millions of people in holy Rome, and the greater part of them

are slaves, yet is it difficult to obtain a slave fit for the duties I wish done, the few of them who are sufficiently educated being kept by the senators and patricians in the city. But this girl is almost a child; can she write as well as speak the Greek and the Latin?"

"Yea, verily," Epaphras said; "for the maiden is fifteen years of age, and hardly knoweth which may be her native tongue, as she hath been accustomed to use them both alike from her very childhood."

"Then I shall mark this a lucky day," said Varus, "for my sight faileth me so that I read with difficulty, and it is a dreary thing to stay all day at home listening to the silly chattering of Calpha and her women. Name the price, Jew, and believe thou that the girl hath found a friend indeed if she can read and write as thou sayest."

"The price of her services," said Epaphras, "is a secondary consideration, and may safely be left to thy liberality; but thou art an honorable Roman, and before I commit the maiden to thy care, there are certain conditions for the performance of which thou must pledge me thy word."

Then the brows of Varus contracted impatiently, and he sharply answered:

"Surely no Roman hath ever bargained with a

Jew but that he is bound by some unreasonable conditions. But what are thine?"

"Naught unreasonable, I hope," replied Epaphras. "The maiden is not a slave, but is free-born, and the conditions are only that she shall not be questioned nor argued with concerning our religion; only that she shall have the Seventh day for her own, without let or hindrance; only that she shall not be required to obey any orders save thine and those of thy wife."

"These are but just and reasonable conditions," said Varus, "and I give thee my sacred word that they shall be faithfully observed. Of course, no sensible Roman ever expects a Jew to abandon the severe and inhuman tenets of his religion, or to permit his children to do so, in order to learn the more reasonable and delightful worship of the gods of Rome; but chiefly desire the girl to read and write for me, and if she should sometimes bring a small amphora from the cellar and serve me with a little wine, that is the only other duty I shall require of her."

"Then I do place her under thy protection, and will take my leave."

"But where and when wilt thou collect her wages?" said Varus.

"Give unto her weekly whatever thou wilt," said Epaphras. "A good home with reputable people, and kind treatment, is more to the maiden

and to me than wages, although we are but poor."

"And wilt thou trust a child with money?" asked Varus.

"Yea," replied Epaphras, his dark face flushing vividly, "I would trust this child with uncounted money — with my life, if need be. If she do ever steal from thee, if she do ever lie to thee, if thou findest her in anything lacking truth, integrity and modesty, take out thine anger upon me with sword or stave, or what thou wilt!"

"What is thy name, child?" asked Varus.

"Dorcas, the daughter of Faustina," answered she.

"If thou dost merit the confidence and praise this Israelite bestows upon thee, Dorcas, count it a happy day which brought thee to my house."

Then, turning to Epaphras, he said, "Farewell."

And Epaphras, with a low bow, said, "Farewell, Vice-Prefect!" But ere he turned away Epaphras clasped the hand of Dorcas, kissed her fair white brow, and, with a glance of unutterable tenderness, whispered, "The Lord preserve thee, child!" to which, in a like subdued tone, she answered, "And thee, also, father."

Then saying, "Follow me," Varus led Dorcas into the atrium, or central hall, into which the numerous rooms of the house all opened, and

thence into a small room on the left, which he called his library; and seating himself comfortably, he placed in her hands some leaves of the *Anabasis*, saying, "Be thou seated, and read this for me."

And thus was Dorcas installed in her humble but pleasant position in the villa of the Vice-Prefect Varus.

CHAPTER II

TOGA VIRILIS

THE months passed swiftly and quietly, and the day came upon which Marcellus was to celebrate his coming of age, after the manner of the golden youth of Rome; and, although he had been sending messages to his mother and orders to the slaves for days before, on the morning of the eventful day he came on horseback to the villa to see for himself that the preparations for the revel were properly made, and to report that the soothsayers had announced that all omens and auguries were auspicious for celebrating an event so important in the life of a young gentleman of the Imperial City. The young man leaped from his horse at the stile in front of the house, and left the beast as if he knew there must be some one there to take charge of him, some one of the slaves to whom the benevolent gods of Rome had given life only that they might minister to the conveniences, passions and pleasures of those upper classes for whom the world was made. The young man came swinging up the broad gravel walk with that swift, martial tread which

the thorough military training that his father had given to him seemed to have made his natural gait; for, careless about many things, the Vice-Prefect had insisted, with steady and inflexible determination, that the boy must be a thorough soldier, and had never permitted any excuses to avail for evading daily military exercises; and, indeed, the youth's martial spirit had seconded his father's settled purpose so well that the boy was as proficient in the tactics, and even in the military laws which prevailed in the armies of the empire, as any veteran. He came rushing into the house with a boisterous and half-boyish good humor and impatience, nodded courteously to his mother, Calpha, kissed some of the slave-girls in her presence, and hugged and tousled others until they ran off screaming and laughing to avoid the embraces of the romping youth, and then began to make minute and rapid inquiries after almost every item of the preparations in progress for the coming feast, and especially as to the quality of snow which had been brought from Mount Soracte, and as to the particular amphoras of wine that had been packed away in it.

During the few months she had been at the villa Dorcas had so greatly pleased the Vice-Prefect by her reading and writing, and by her pleasant but always cautious conversation, that he felt the girl to be indispensable to his comfort,

and never permitted anything to interfere with the services she was accustomed to render him. But whenever any duty of his official position required his presence in the city she was left very much to her own devices and inclinations; and generally she went into the atrium and volunteered to aid Calpha and the slaves in the preparation or spinning of wool and flax, in preserving various fruits, and in other domestic operations; and she was always so quiet, cheerful and neat that her aid was exceedingly acceptable. But both Calpha and the slaves observed that whenever their talk drifted into the licentiousness and immodesty which were common in the gossipings of all Roman women, high and low, the girl at once became silent, her sweet young face grew very grave, and if it were at all convenient to leave the atrium she would do so immediately; but her uniform kindness to all of them prevented them from resenting her manifest loathing of subjects which always formed the staple of their talk, and the tenderness and reverence which were constantly manifest in her deportment toward Calpha, the wife of Varus, the mother of Marcellus, the mistress of these slaves, was a thing so new and pleasant to that most reputable matron that she wondered how and where the girl had acquired manners that seemed naturally to exhibit a degree of respect for herself which no Roman mother ever

expected or received from her own daughters — a reverence that was not based upon fear, like that of her domestics, but that seemed to be spontaneous, loving and sincere.

Indeed, while the Vice-Prefect Varus was a better husband, a better father, a better master, and, in almost every respect, a better man than any other Roman of his rank and wealth, Dorcas had dwelt at the villa but a short time before she perceived, young as she was, that under the social and political system of the empire the wives of even the most reputable Romans were only a better sort of slaves, in spite of the vain shadow of respect which the law threw over them. Calpha, in every respect a very worthy and sensible woman, stood somewhat higher in the estimation of her husband and son (themselves most excellent Romans) than would a mare that had been dam to a very fine colt, or a slave that had chanced to render some extraordinary service. The single advantage that the wife had over the other domestics consisted in the fact that her legal relation to the master of the house made her offspring legitimate, and also gave her power to control her husband's other slaves.

Not knowing that the young man had come home, Dorcas went into the atrium, as usual, to offer such aid as she might be able to render in the doing of their domestic tasks; and Marcellus no

sooner saw her than, gazing upon her with undisguised admiration, he cried aloud: "Dioscuri! but the Vice-Prefect hath shown marvelous good taste in the purchase of such a new slave as that! And do thou remember, girl, that to prevent any growth of jealousy upon the part of Calpha against my most reputable father, from this day I claim thee for mine own." Then, darting forward, he seized her hand in one of his own, and catching her about the waist with the other, he kissed her before she could break from his grasp, while he rattled away in praise of her beauty: "By Aphrodite! thou art beautiful! Thy brow is fairer than a marble god's! Thine eyes are bluer and deeper than the summer sky! Thy lips are redder than the scarlet cherries! Thy cheeks are pinker than the sea shell's delicatest bloom!" But before the delighted and laughing youth had finished his panegyric Dorcas had glided out of his embrace, and sprang away behind his mother's chair, and stood there gazing, flushed and indignant, upon the handsome youth, but silent still. "Come thou hither," said Marcellus, "for thou shalt be fast friend with me. By foam-born Venus, no other Roman hath so beautiful a slave, and thou shalt be my pet and favorite henceforth! Come hither, girl!"

But Dorcas raised her queenly little head, and, gazing with quiet self-possession into the young

man's eager face, in low and modulated tones as sweet as flute-notes, answered thus: "Thou art greatly mistaken, centurion, for I am not a slave, but born as free as thou art; and I hope that thy conduct, which seemeth to have grown out of this mistake, will never be repeated."

"What, then, art thou doing here?" asked Marcellus.

"I serve the Vice-Prefect Varus upon a contract, one condition of which is that I am subject to the orders of no one in his house except his own and those of thy mother, Calpha!"

"Then thou, Calpha, command this beautiful hireling that she come hither and make friends with me."

"Nay!" said Calpha. "I will in no wise interfere with thy father's wishes, by which the maiden is to be free of all control; for he is marvelously attached to Dorcas. And besides," she continued with a sly smile, "to me it seemeth that one of the handsomest youths in holy Rome should scorn to implore his mother's help to win the damsel's favor!"

"I will not do so," said Marcellus; "but by the gods of Rome, I will have her, and win her for myself, too! For there is no girl of her class in the Imperial City that would hesitate to put all her wages into an offering to Venus to gain so much of my praise and admiration as thou dost

scornfully reject." But Dorcas had quietly left the room, nor did Marcellus see her again that day, although he was here, there and everywhere, bustling around and meddling with the arrangements for the coming feast, now and then exhibiting toward the young female slaves a tactful familiarity and kindness which showed that his boast of being a favorite was no extravagance, and which, alas! also showed that the sacred delicacy which belongs to womanhood was unknown and unrecognized even in a household so very respectable as that of the Vice-Prefect.

About nightfall the young friends of the centurion began to arrive, and many of them were accompanied by favorite slaves or other feminine friends. Soon the customary rites began with the burning of the beard of Marcellus, with libations to the Lares and Penates, the household gods of Rome, with other libations and offerings to Venus and to Mars, and with strange ceremonies which the later Romans had learned of Egypt in honor of Anubis, Astarte, and Cybele!

Then the banquet began, in which the young men reclined around the table spread in the great hall, tasted delicacies which were of themselves enough to prove that almost every clime and people under heaven paid tribute to the luxury as well as the power of Rome. Each separate course of the feast was followed or accompanied

by liberal draughts of different wines, and the girls who reclined with the young gentlemen at table (a privilege from which their own sisters, and all matrons, were jealously excluded by Roman customs) were not behind their masculine associates in eating or in drinking, or in wit and ribaldry. Hour after hour the feast continued, the wine circulated more and more freely, the jest became broader, the conversation louder and more unrestrained, and the song and glance more reckless, until far into the night, both sexes seemed to have reached the last stages of inebriety and indecency; and some of them were still lying around the tables in the hall, some had wandered out into the surrounding grounds, and, here and there upon the rustic benches or the pleasanter couch of grass, slept off the wild debauch. It was a drunken revelry that would have disgraced a Roman in the earlier and better days of Rome, but which at that era was the universal custom among the wealthy classes, not supposed to merit censure at all, and which was regarded as the usual and proper thing by the Vice-Prefect and his wife, whose only concern was to see that the wants of the guests were properly supplied, and that any approach to quarreling was promptly checked before it could assume the features of a brawl. It was a fair index to the state of private morals throughout the empire, and especially at Rome.

These young men were not lost to the sense of shame that in a better age would necessarily have sprung from such luxurious and unmanly excesses because they were bad men or worse than other Romans of their class, but they were entirely devoid of any sense of shame because they did not know that there was anything in these customs and conduct of which to be ashamed. They were only acting in accordance with the teachings of their age and country, and saw nothing disreputable to their own characters, or unacceptable to the gods, in any feature of their revelry.

Dorcas had declined the request of Calpha that she would remain in the atrium, but, seated at one of the small windows characteristic of Roman architecture at the far end of one of the little rooms which opened into the hall, herself in darkness almost, she gazed with vivid interest into the illuminated room, watching the rites and subsequent revelry, until, with burning cheek and eye, she slipped out of the window quietly and sought the solitude of her own chamber, adjoining that which Varus called his library, and repeated, half in reverie, in the splendid language of the Greeks, words that seemed to be practically illustrated by the scenes she had just witnessed:

“Now the works of the flesh are manifest, idolatry, drunkenness, revelings and such like; of which I tell you before, as I have also told you

in times past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance; against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts! "

But continued she, musingly, " The centurion is so young, so handsome, so full of life, and joy, and kindness, and he knows no better than he does! "

CHAPTER III

IN WHICH DORCAS ASKETH QUESTIONS

THE next morning, at a late hour, the revelers whom choice had detained at the villa, and those whom vinous excesses had rendered incapable of making their way back to the city, after certain matutinal libations to the gods and a generous breakfast, took their departure. And Marcellus, also, went to take formal command of his century which his father had obtained for him, and had selected beforehand. For some days he did not return to the villa, but Dorcas learned, from daily conversations in the family, that the young centurion was pursuing a round of dissipations among his friends, some of whom were already, and some of whom were expecting to be, admitted into the military service of the empire about the same period. She remarked with astonishment the fact that while Varus was himself the bearer of nearly all the information the family received concerning Marcellus, and was informed of all the incidents of the feasts and debaucheries in which that gallant young gentleman participated, neither he nor Calpha ever uttered a

word of censure or of anxiety, but did use many expressions which indicated their opinion to be that the dissipations constantly referred to were all right and proper enough in a young man, entirely consonant with the customs and usages of Roman social life, and with the religious ideas of paganism.

The Vice-Prefect was so much gratified with the manner in which his young scribe and reader performed the tasks required of her, that he insensibly began to enlarge the sphere of her duties, so that, in place of confining her to the reading of such classics as belonged to him, and copying passages which pleased him out of those borrowed from acquaintances and friends, he began gradually to employ her quick intelligence and deft fingers in making copies of such reports connected with his official business as he deemed it to be necessary to make in duplicate. One day Varus laid before her the report of his criminal jurisdiction for the preceding month, setting forth that he had ordered the execution or other punishment of certain malefactors who had been tried and condemned by the magistrates and transferred to him for punishment. In transcribing this report she came upon the following sentence:

“ Besides these cases of ordinary crime, I had before me seven wretches accused of the crime of being Christians. Two of them, who had remained silent when interrogated

in sight of the implements of torture, confessed their guilt, and sacrificed to Jupiter, and were thereupon discharged. Three of them, who remained obstinately silent, I had flogged soundly and banished them out of thy dominions. Two of them, who insolently boasted of their devotion to that malignant superstition, and ridiculed the gods of Rome, I ordered to be immediately beheaded."

When the young girl read this statement in the official report, she turned pale and trembled so that her fingers refused to perform their office, and the cessation of her work caught the attention of the Vice-Prefect, who was looking on admiring the ease and elegance with which she wrote.

"What aileth thee, Dorcas?" he said kindly. "Art thou ill, child? If so, defer thy task until to-morrow, and a good night's rest will restore thee."

But mastering her emotion by a resolute effort, she replied:

"Nay, Vice-Prefect! It hath passed me by already, and I will finish the work now."

After having done so, and finding that the Vice-Prefect seemed to be more inclined to conversation than to assigning her any other task, she said:

"In thy report I find that thou hast inflicted punishment upon murderers, thieves and house breakers. Also that thou hast punished others who were not accused of such crimes, simply saying that they were charged with being Christians.

Wilt thou tell me what crimes these persons had committed? "

"Why," said Varus, "they were members of that odious sect which follows Jesus Christ, whom the Procurator, Pontius Pilate, crucified at Jerusalem, in the days when the Emperor Tiberius ruled the world. A most pestilent superstition, which, in spite of the efforts of many pious emperors to suppress it, hath spread throughout the empire. But the most holy Emperor Maxentius hath seen the evil of any indulgence granted to this criminal association, and hath ordered that its members be punished wherever found, according to the edicts made by the Emperor Diocletian. But surely thou — a Jewess, must have heard of this Jesus! "

"Yea," answered Dorcas; "but thy report sheweth that these whom thou didst punish were called Christians, and I asked thee what crimes they were said to have committed? "

"None," said Varus, "except that they were Christians; that is the very worst of crimes."

"But if I do not weary thee," said Dorcas, "tell me whether it is the custom of the Romans to punish all who differ with them in religion? "

"Surely not," answered Varus; "Rome protects and welcomes all religions under heaven, and doth not even punish thine own stubborn and presumptuous people, but permitteth the Jews to live

in the city, although they refuse to sacrifice unto the gods of Rome."

"Why, then, is it esteemed so great a crime to profess the Christian faith?"

"Because," rejoined Varus, "this most odious superstition hath grown into a secret organization governed by extravagant laws contrary to the customs of our ancestors and inconsistent with the laws of the empire."

"Wilt thou inform me in what things they differ from the Roman laws—things of consequence enough to incur the displeasure of the Emperor?"

"Certainly, child, if thou seekest knowledge. In the first place, this most impious sect mock and deride the gods of Rome and every other nation, refusing to visit the temples or to sacrifice. This mere atheism of the Christians would not be esteemed a crime punishable by law; but this pernicious sect hath held and taught for three centuries that no man ought to bear arms even in defense of his country, and the acceptance of this pusillanimous dogma would destroy the legions and expose Rome and the empire to be plundered by the Barbarians. Of course the law does not and ought not to permit the existence of a sect which makes it a matter of religion to discourage enlistments and promote desertion."

"I can understand," replied Dorcas, "how it

may be that a great and warlike people, as the Romans have always been, should seek to destroy a religion which opposes all wars, and forbids its followers to bear arms. Yet, Vice-Prefect, to an innocent and ignorant girl like me, it doth seem that thine own experience upon this point would lead thee to protect, rather than to punish, the Christians."

"How can that be possible?" asked Varus laughing.

"Thou art a soldier," said Dorcas, "and, I have heard, an officer of approved courage and experience, that hath borne the imperial standard at the head of thy cohorts in Europe, Asia and Africa. Dost thou not think, after all the wrong and bloodshed and suffering which thou must have seen, that it would be a blessing to mankind, and especially to the common people of the world, upon whom fall the burdens and ills of war, if there should never be war again?"

"Yea," answered Varus, "a measureless blessing, truly! But that cannot be, child. There must be wars; and the nation that would preserve itself or govern others, must be first in war."

"Yet if thine account of the Christians be correct, all wars must cease if all men were to become Christians: and thou sayest this would be a universal blessing!"

"But the only road to peace lies through the fields of war: only conquest leads to peace," said the Vice-Prefect.

"Hast thou ever been engaged in any war in which the people on either side began the struggle? Or is it true, Vice-Prefect, that all the wars that afflict mankind grow out of the ambitions and crimes of rulers, and generally about things concerning which the common people know very little and care less?"

"That is true to a great extent; but it is true also that soldiers must fight for their standards, and the law cannot tolerate the doctrine of 'non-resistance' which these accursed Christians teach."

"Wilt thou inform me what else there may be in the teachings of this hated sect that is contrary to the laws and customs of Rome, besides their opposition to bearing arms?"

"One other thing in regard to which they despise our laws and customs and the practice of antiquity, is the fact that they make it religion to abolish slavery. They teach that no Christian can lawfully own a slave, and that if any slave becomes a Christian he should be set free; so that just as this abominable sect groweth, the number of freedmen steadily increaseth. This is another one of those 'extravagant laws and opinions' which the most holy Emperor Galerius denounces

in his Edict of Toleration issued 'to reclaim the deluded Christians into the way of reason and of nature.' "

"I have had small opportunities to gain knowledge of all these matters," said Dorcas.

"And thou art the only maiden, or matron either, I have known that desired to gain knowledge of any matters of importance. The Roman women are satisfied with the shameful ignorance which maketh them but dreary companions for sensible men."

"May I then learn by asking thee?" said Dorcas blandly.

"Yea, child, I admire thee both because thou knowest much already, and because thou art eager to learn more."

"I understand," she said, "that Roman law and custom fosters slavery, and thou hast informed me that this hated Christian sect is, and has always been, settled in its opposition to slavery of any kind. I see clearly, therefore, why the Roman slave-owners seek to destroy a people who hold a religion that condemns the slave code in every line and section of it. But, Vice-Prefect, doth thy experience teach thee that slavery is a good thing in itself?"

"It hath always existed," replied Varus. "It is in accordance with 'the ancient laws and public discipline of the Romans,' and 'the religion and

ceremonies instituted by our fathers,' and is 'the practice of antiquity' even as the most holy Emperor Galerius saith in the edict to which I have referred; and these Christians are impious in despising it and teaching that it is religion to abolish it."

"But is it a good thing, Vice-Prefect? Wouldst thou prefer to be a slave thyself? Is it good for any save the masters who are rich? Is it, in the long run, good even for them?"

"These are strange and perplexing questions, Dorcas, and I cannot rightly answer them at this time. Let it satisfy thee to know that slavery is the universal custom of all peoples in all ages, and it is impious and unholy in this Christian sect to oppose it."

"Are there other matters besides war and slavery in regard to which these Christians violate the laws and customs of the Romans?"

"Yea, many others," answered Varus, "one of the most important of which is that they teach as religion that all the laws and customs of Rome which legalize the superiority of one man, or class, above another, and which legalize the right to acquire, hold or transmit private property rights, are contrary to the will of Christ, and ought to be abolished. They teach community of property, and claim to have practiced this worst form of agrarianism for three hundred years — an

abominable system which would destroy all property and subvert the empire and all government if it should be once adopted."

"Thou didst inform me, Vice-Prefect, that this sect, although punished and outlawed by many of the emperors, tolerated by but few, and protected by none, had spread throughout the empire. Canst thou tell me whether it hath prospered in property as well as in numbers?"

"Yea," answered Varus; "they hold all property in common: the individual can own nothing except his wearing apparel and daily supplies for himself and family; yet the Church (which is the name by which they designate their illegal and pernicious communities, each of which appears to be a distinct and independent democracy) is growing more and more wealthy everywhere."

"Doth it not seem to thee, Vice-Prefect, that if the Christian communities, by this democratic policy, have so prospered even in the face of the proscriptions written against them in the imperial law, that the same system would secure the like prosperity for other people also? and that it would be good news to the poor if it were universally adopted?"

"Dorcas, thou art the strangest girl that I have ever seen. Thy questions open up continually new and marvelous views of things of which no Roman woman ever thinks at all, and thou art

sometimes hard to answer." But at this moment Marcellus saluted his father from the open door, in his usual musical, rollicking tone:

"May I come in, Vice-Prefect, and profit by this grand discussion upon laws, religion and statesmanship?"

"Come," said Varus; "and if thou wilt listen to this young girl thou wilt have much to think about. This is my son, the centurion, Marcellus, and this is Dorcas, my scribe and reader."

"All hail!" said Marcellus, with mock gravity. "Now let the fair Aspasia resume the broken lessons."

"I think," said Dorcas, rising, "that there would be more profit if I go to aid thy mother with the work."

"Thou shalt remain, Dorcas," said Varus; and then turning to Marcellus he continued: "This Dorcas hath found, in transcribing some minutes of the criminal report, an entry of the punishment of certain malevolent and contumacious Christians, and hath inquired why the Roman laws afflict them; and upon being informed that it is because they teach a religion in opposition to war, slavery, social and political distinctions between men and classes of men, and all laws of private property, she hath suggested, even by her inquiries, whether war is not an evil thing and a curse to the world, and whether slavery is not an

evil thing, and whether, if the Christians prosper by communism, even under the malediction of the laws, that system might not really be best for all men. What thinkest thou, centurion, of all these things?"

"I say that war is a glorious thing for all of the better classes; that slavery is necessary for their convenience, and that without offices, rank, privileges and private property, we would be no better than the plebeians; and that, as to the common herd, it doth not matter a denarius to any sensible man whether war or slavery bless or curse them. That is the hard, common-sense, practical creed of the respectable classes in Rome, and I indorse it with all my soul."

And Varus, desirous of keeping the splendid youth near to himself, and willing to call out more of the girl's strange fancies, which amused and interested him, turned to her, saying:

"What answer has thou, Dorcas, for this declamation of the centurion?"

But Dorcas answered: "I have none, nor do I presume to dispute such matters either with thee or with him, although by thy permission I did ask thee certain questions."

"If thou art too modest to advance thine own opinions," laughed out Varus, "ask whatever thou desirest to know."

"Wilt thou inform me whether there are yet

other laws, and customs of the Romans to which this Christian sect maintains its obstinate opposition? ”

“ No others that now occur to me,” answered Varus, “ except such as thine own people refuse to obey. They deny the divinity of the gods, they scorn the idols, they refuse to adore the eikons, and refuse to sacrifice, or even to visit the temples. But the Jews are like them in all these respects.”

“ Art thou a Jewess, Dorcas? ” inquired Marcellus.

The young woman made no answer, but turned with an appealing look to Varus, who thereupon spoke as follows:

“ Centurion, I agreed with the Israelite Epaphras, who brought to me my incomparable secretary, that she should not be questioned concerning her religion, and thou must respect the terms of mine agreement, and allow thy question to remain unanswered.”

“ But,” said Marcellus apologetically, “ I did not intend to refer to her religion, but to nationality. Surely, with those wonderful blue eyes and her complexion fairer than a lily, our Dorcas can hardly be a Jewess by birth? ”

“ I think not,” said Dorcas. “ The excellent Epaphras, who hath been my guardian from mine infancy (for my parents died before I can remember them), hath told me that my mother was the

daughter of a chieftain of the Cimbri, whose wife followed him to Rome when he was brought hither as a captive from the regions that border on the far North Sea."

The young centurion had all this time regarded Dorcas with looks of undisguised and ardent admiration, and when she ceased speaking he exclaimed: "Dioscuri! but I knew no Jewish blood could flow through the blue veins that show so beautifully beneath her snowy skin! Only the frozen North can yield these golden-haired and heaven-eyed maidens, fairer than marbles of Pentelicus!" Then, seeing that the girl was painfully embarrassed by his gaze and speech — an evidence of native modesty most new and inviting to him — he continued: "The Vice-Prefect hath most truly said that the Emperor punishes this odious Christian sect because of their treasonable opposition to the military laws, whereby they discourage enlistments in the army and promote desertions therefrom, and because of their abhorrence of slavery, and because of their visionary and impious denial of private property rights, and their vain dreams of a democracy in which social and political distinctions between men and classes shall be abolished; but we younger men, who love life and appreciate all the advantages which the benevolent gods of Rome have provided for the patrician youth, hate these accursed Galileans be-

cause their harsh, ascetic creed condemns as sin all the pleasant indulgences which nature craves, and denounce, as falsest idols, all the propitious gods that sanction them! Ah, Dorcas, who that hath a human heart would desire to live in a world where the service of glorious Mars is denounced as crime? where the sacrifices to Venus are outlawed and despised? where Bacchus, ever beautiful and ever young, the solacer of all sorrows, the inciter to all joys, is held up to detestation as a brutal god? A malignant superstition, indeed, must that be that in place of leaving remorse and sorrow for the weary old age that loathes life and all the good things of the world, seeketh to crucify all human pleasing desires even in the very hey-day of youth, and congeal every fount of pleasure by the requirements of its inhuman creed! If thou, sweet Dorcas, hast been reared up in the scarcely less harsh and unsocial religion of the stubborn and ascetic Jews, let no false compassion for the sufferings of these malevolent Christians pervert thy heart and lead thee astray, but rather suffer me, thy friend and admirer, to teach thee the tender, human, beautiful religion of holy Rome, wherein some delightful divinity shall accept as devotion every sacred right that can minister to pleasure, and so reconcile the heart to all the calamities of fate which cannot be avoided, by calling into delicious exer-

cise every faculty of mind and body that can minister to joy! O beautiful Dorcas! learn thou the true and beautiful religion of sacred, eternal Rome!"

"Of the natural results of which thy birth-night's revelry was the only specimen which hath come under my observation," said Dorcas, with greater asperity than any one had ever heard before in her melodious voice.

"And what, O severe Vestal, was there wrong about the feast? The wine was good, the edibles excellent, the gods propitious, and the girls surpassingly pleasant and witty!"

"And if thou didst have a sister, centurion, couldst thou have desired to see her among those pleasant, witty girls? If not, doth it appear right to thee to place the sisters of some other youth amid such surroundings?"

"Dioscuri!" he answered. "These girls are only plebeians! Why dost thou ask me whether I would have desired to see my sister among these?"

"Because thou didst send thy mother, Calpha, to invite me to join them; and if thou art without a law to teach thee that this thing was wrong, thou art then a law unto thyself, and thou oughtest not to place a young girl who never injured thee, and whom thou scarcely knowest where thou thinkest it would have disgraced thy sister to be found."

The young man, for the first time in his life, was covered with confusion in the presence of a pretty girl, and hardly knew what answer to make. The idea of virtue in any sense except that of personal courage (the Roman signification of the word), the idea of chastity that loves only what things are pure, and loves them for their own sake only, was inexplicable to him; but finally, with much embarrassment, but with perfect sincerity, he replied:

"Dorcas, in Rome a line of conduct that is right and proper to the patrician class is impossible to the plebeians; and conduct that is right and proper enough for the plebeians is utterly impossible for the patrician. Only the odious and democratic Christians assert the brotherhood of man, and deny the privileges of rank and fortune, seeking to reduce all classes to one common level, which is the tendency of that cruel asceticism for which we so bitterly hate them. So that they would not only rob us of the pursuits and pleasures natural to our age and rank, but would deny the lower classes those pleasures and advantages which they obtain by our favor, and are cruel to both patrician and plebeian."

The young girl's pure and beautiful face grew very pale, and a strange fire gleamed from her soft, expressive eyes, as she replied in low, penetrating tones:

“ I do not know, centurion, how it all may be ; but, surely, if these despised and persecuted Christians have hope in this life only, they must be of all men most miserable. If they teach and practice a self-denial so severe as thou sayest, do they not propose some glorious compensation for its sufferings? What sublime reward do they offer to those whom they would induce to accept their faith, and so crucify themselves unto the world? ”

“ Nothing that is tangible or satisfactory — nothing definite or sure — nothing except visionary promises of everlasting happiness beyond this life in exchange for earthly wretchedness.”

“ If such promises are built upon any sure and trustworthy foundation,” said Dorcas, “ it seems to me that it would be the part of wisdom to accept them — life is so uncertain, fortune so fickle, pleasure so evanescent. And, indeed, the excellent Epaphras hath taught me that the great men who built up the mighty kingdoms of Egypt, Assyria, Greece and Persia (and even Rome, also) practiced the very same temperance and self-denial which thou dost so bitterly condemn; and that the prevalence of voluptuousness, luxury and pleasure among such as thou hast called the better classes is ever the precursor of national disaster. I know not whether this be true, but, if true, it seems to me that even for this transient, earthly

life sobriety is better than licentiousness for all men of every class."

"True! true!" cried out the Vice-Prefect. "The men that made Rome great, and that acted their own parts greatly, were never drunkards, nor gluttons, nor great lovers of pleasure! Remember that, centurion, remember that!"

Just then a slave announced the evening meal, and the conversation was suspended by their adjournment to the great hall, which, in Roman dwelling-houses, was more used than any other apartment.

CHAPTER IV

IN WHICH DORCAS RUNNETH AWAY

SWIFTLY and pleasantly passed the time for Dorcas at the Roman's beautiful villa; and day by day the brave old Varus became more and more attached to his young secretary, and day by day she became more necessary to his happiness, not only as reader and copyist, but also as companion and friend. She was the first chaste, cultivated girl this patrician soldier had ever known. The Roman wife was emphatically the mistress of the house only; and the bright, educated women upon whom, in earlier life, his wandering fancy had been fixed in temporary devotion, were the graceful and accomplished hetairæ of Greece, the coarser but still attractive women of Rome, the seductive beauties of Egypt, or female adventurers from other provinces of the vast Empire, who made their way to public favor and notoriety by mere physical perfectness, or by graceful accomplishments and mental brightness. The patrician classes of the Roman women were uneducated, ill-treated and despised. Marriage was a contract, a business transaction — a very important

business matter, too—to the doing of which the law compelled men under onerous penalties; and Varus, having once transacted this unpleasant business, had abided by the terms of the contract (which had really been an advantageous one) with an exemplary consistency unusual and honorable at Rome. His own daughters had died before reaching maturity, and, although he was a good father, he had never realized the sentiment of elevated and pleasant affection and companionship before Dorcas came to dwell in his house. They had long and frequent conversations, not only upon the subjects of which his manuscripts treated, but upon general questions of ethics and religion. Strangely enough, the girl had never avowed openly any religious convictions, a fact which he naturally accounted for by his belief that she was a Jewess, between whom and a Pagan there could be found no common grounds for compatibility of sentiments. But the life they were leading was very pleasant to both of them. The aged warrior and the young girl conceived a strong friendship for each other, founded upon mutual respect and mutual tolerance. He vastly admired the transparent delicacy, purity, and intelligence of the chaste young spirit with which he was brought into daily contact, and she gladly honored a nature so true, manly and straightforward as his ever appeared to be.

Upon a single point they seemed to be utterly unable to comprehend each other. The Vice-Prefect's idea of right was that it consisted of what the laws require one to do, or to omit, and of whatever was considered to be usual and honorable in a Roman of rank. He could not comprehend her thought that right exists independently of all Roman statutes and customs — civil, military or religious; and that these were to be tried by some standard above and beyond the reach of all Roman jurisprudence, civil or military. She was incapable of understanding how it was possible that so good a man could be satisfied with the doing of every duty imposed by law, custom or religion, seeming to be profoundly ignorant of any higher sense of obligation, or of any purer standard of ethics. But there was no jarring or discord between them, and their discussions commonly terminated in an amicable recognition of the fact that some things which seemed to be familiar as household words to one were an unintelligible jargon to the other. He naturally attributed it to the fact that she was a woman, and, therefore, naturally subject to intellectual hysterics, or mental obtuseness, as all other women are.

The relations existing between herself and the young centurion gradually assumed a strange and almost indefinable shape. It would not be en-

tirely incorrect to say that he failed to comprehend the passion for her which was daily becoming more and more a part of his existence. Any sentiment of pity for her personally, or any regard for the chastity of which she was the living embodiment, was beyond the range of his experience. The Roman youth of his age and rank was incapable of either understanding or believing in any such thing, even among the girls whom he might regard as his equals, and among whom he expected that he would some day be compelled to select a wife. In fact, that genuine modesty which loves and cherishes whatever is pure for its own sake, was incomprehensible to both sexes in the higher classes of that age. They knew that marriage meant a contract into which no man but an idiot would enter because of any merely sentimental preference — a contract that, however repulsive it might be and generally was, ought to be justified by the social and political advantages to be reaped from it. As for what they denominated "love," it was the fashion to seek it elsewhere than in the marital relation; and a Roman who was actually in love with his wife would generally have been an object of ridicule and contemptuous pity. And yet, after Marcellus had first met Dorcas with such boisterous demonstrations of his preference for her, he had never ventured upon any similar advances; why, he

could not have told. He therefore found himself daily becoming more and more hopelessly enamored of a girl who quietly but continually became more and more unapproachable to him. It was a monstrous paradox in his experience, and he would have laughed loud and mockingly if he had discovered any one of his associates in a position at once so inexplicable and so tantalizing.

Without seeming to do so, she had carefully avoided giving him an opportunity to see her alone, and yet, in the presence of his father or mother, she had met him without a shadow of embarrassment and with unvarying kindness. She really enjoyed being with him. He was certainly the handsomest young man she had ever seen, and his rollicking and boisterous manners and self-conceit did not seem to be much out of place in one who was so young, an only son, and heir to such splendid advantages. He was so quick, so intelligent, so kind and generous, and of such sterling integrity according to the light by which he walked, that it was impossible to be near him without feeling the almost irresistible magnetism of his healthy, hearty, manly character and person. And yet to her this splendid youth seemed maimed and dwarfed in the immortal part of him, and, knowing the moral deformity which paganism had produced in him, in common with all the youth of his rank in the great heathen empire,

she felt a certain indefinable sense of pity and compassion for the undeveloped spiritual nature which she believed must be inherent in a physical and intellectual organization so robust and beautiful. True, she herself was but fifteen years of age, and the colder blood of the north which temperately flowed through her brain and heart, had permitted her swift and bright intellect to grow and blossom wonderfully under the careful and life-long tutelage by which she had profited, while, in every physical sense, she was little more than a child, at an age at which the warmer-blooded daughters of Italy were passionate women on all the sensuous sides of existence, and children in all other things.

The twain seemed in many particulars to be typical of the antagonistic systems under which they had been reared. He was a fit type of the hard, practical, physical life of splendid Rome, with its vast and truthful boastings of action and achievement — she of another and utterly different civilization — a system that exalted spiritual life and regarded with scorn, or, at least, with indifference, all of the pomp and splendor of the world in which Rome gloried — a system which boldly taught, in the very teeth of all of the wisdom of the ancients, and all of the practice of the centuries, the utter injustice of all class distinctions and prerogatives, and the worth and dignity of

man, not as kings, nobles, philosophers or millionaires; not as Romans, Greeks, Jews or barbarians, but simply as man—a truth unknown to human philosophy and statesmanship until Jesus Christ proclaimed it.

Often and over again these salient and irreconcilable differences cropped up out of even the simplest and most informal conversations, and both the Vice-Prefect and the centurion would listen with wonder, respect and interest to the young girl, yet almost a child, who, quietly and modestly, but persistently, dared to maintain that war, in which Rome gloried, was only national crime and legalized murder; that slavery, which was sanctioned by the laws and religion of the empire and the practice of all ages and of all peoples, was contrary to the will of God and to the honest, unbiased deliverance of every man's consciousness; that all class distinctions founded upon accidents of birth, rank or fortune were a wrong to the people; and that the legal right to hold, acquire and transmit private property-rights served only to foster inhuman selfishness, and to give immortality to fraud, pride, tyranny and injustice. These radical opinions were never uttered by the young girl as if she had learned and repeated from memory lessons at variance with the laws and usages of Rome, nor with the dogmatic air which characterized the utterances

of the philosophers; but as if they were the inspiration of convictions too profound for argument — the outpourings of some hidden but living well-spring of feeling and of thought. This intellectual and moral purity and strength in a young and beautiful girl was something so new, strange and attractive to both father and son, that often after some sudden, almost sybilline utterance that seemed to flow spontaneously from the very depths of her pellucid soul, Varus would say:

“She hath a daimon, centurion!”

And Marcellus would answer: “Yea, Vice-Prefect — a wise and beautiful daimon!”

And this explanation of a womanly intelligence and chastity of thought and feeling which was phenomenal in the experience of these two excellent Romans, as it would have been in the experience of almost all men of their rank in the Imperial City, was confirmed to their minds by the strange fact that Dorcas habitually stated things in the form of questions or suggestions that cut down to the very tap-roots of polytheism, and of all the social and political life of Rome.

One evening, sitting in the shade of the trees (more than half the life of the Romans was passed out of doors), the Vice-Prefect was explaining to Dorcas and Marcellus a plan of the great city, and expatiating upon the glory and

greatness of Rome, as he pointed out an arch here which indicated a triumph of the Roman arms in Britain, that showed the subjection of great warlike tribes in Gaul, and the other similar successes in Germania. Here were mementos of victories in Africa, in Asia — almost throughout the world.

“Thus you perceive,” said Varus, “that holy Rome, under the protection of the immortal and favorable gods, hath triumphed over the nations of mankind, and compelled them to contribute to her grandeur and her glory. Centurion, never forget how magnificent and glorious is thy native Rome, nor how the benevolent gods have favored thee by giving thee honorable birth and position in the all-illustrious empire, nor that it must be the labor of thy life to add to her renown.”

Then said Dorcas quietly: “How many people are in Rome, Vice-Prefect?”

“More than four millions,” answered Varus, “a number unequaled by any city in the world.”

“And how many of them are slaves, Vice-Prefect?”

“About two-thirds of them are slaves,” said he.

“Then,” said Dorcas, “if the same ratio hold good throughout Italy, dost thou not think that the ‘liberty and glory’ of which thou dost so fondly boast are words which have no meaning to

by far the greater part of the Romans? or is it true, Vice-Prefect, that just as the government of Rome hath advanced in all physical power and progress, the condition of the slaves, and of all the poor, hath become continually harder and more hopeless; so that the grandeur for which thou dost magnify thy gods has been, in truth, the pride and glory of the few only, and the ever-increasing curse and burden of the many? Dost thou not think it had been better to have had less glory for the few who have a living interest in the affairs of government, and greater liberty and comfort for the vast multitude upon whom the waste and weight of all this glory rests, and none of its advantages? "

"Why, the slaves never think of these things," said Marcellus, "and if they did there would be endless servile war."

"Do the gods also control the destinies of the slaves and of the poor?" asked Dorcas.

"Certainly! All men are under the immortal gods," said Varus, "in whom we move and have our being."

"How many of thy gods are there?" asked Dorcas.

"The Flamen of Jupiter cannot answer that to thee."

"And which of them," asked Dorcas, "is the especial protector of the slaves and the poor?"

Which of them giveth his divine compassion and unfailing aid to these unfortunates who constitute the great masses of the Roman people? What are the names of the divinities that invite the adoration and solicit the worship of the slaves and of the plebeians? Who more need divine assistance in proportion as they are deprived of all human respect, and of all the advantages of life? What kind divinity stands pledged to give justice, protection, blessings unto the plebeians and slaves?"

"I never thought of that before," answered Varus. "All other classes have their own protecting gods—even pirates, panderers and thieves—but there are no especial divinities for the slaves and plebeians as such."

"Ah! then," said Dorcas, "it doth seem to me that if some splendid and compassionate god should take his station in your Pantheon, and cry aloud to these despised and afflicted people, 'Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest! Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me; for I, the Divinity, am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your lives; for My yoke is easy and My burden light'—it seems to me that such a divinity would be loved and worshiped by the common people with such adoration as Jupiter hath never known!"

“Why,” said Varus, “thou hast uttered, in thy strange and beautiful fancy, almost such teachings as the odious Christian sect ascribe to Jesus, except that while they proclaim a savior for the slaves and plebeians, as thou hast fancied, they deny the great gods who protect the mighty Roman state, and all that is respectable therein.”

“Dost thou suppose, then,” said Dorcas, “that it was on this very account that the great Emperors Tiberius, Domitian, Trajan, Antoninus, Severus, Maximin, Decius, Gallus, Valerian, Diocletian, and now Maxentius, have always pursued and punished these Christians? Indeed, I have often heard the wise and learned Epaphras declare that the Pharisees and Scribes, who were the rich and respectable classes of his countrymen, crucified the poor and friendless Jesus, because ‘they were covetous,’ and He taught the communion of saints, which is community of property and rights, and that all men are born free and equal, a gospel for the poor that would abolish slavery and war, and would either level down the patricians to an equality with the plebeians, or level upwards and raise the plebeians to equality with the patricians, as I have heard thee also say these Christians do still teach.”

“Verily,” answered Varus, “the Christians do so teach; and the strangest thing to me is that thy questions do evermore bring up things in such

a curious light that one is, for the moment, almost compelled to believe that these abominable heresies which would destroy the empire are right and true and best for the multitude. But, much as it pleaseth me to hear thy strange suggestions, which do continually provoke the mind to follow new and wonderful lines of thought that I have not found in Greek or Roman philosophy, I must leave thee now and go into the city, for there are impending disturbances that will require my presence there to-night. Dorcas, fare thee well. Centurion, farewell."

Then, under the seductive power of that soft Italian air, the west still rosy with the just sunken sun, there was silence between the young and beautiful couple — a dangerous silence, in which the fond emotions of all tender hearts were quickly brought to bloom even long before old Hesiod sung:

"O Hesperus! thou bringest all good things!"

"See, Dorcas," said Marcellus, "how brilliantly the star of evening gleameth even through the half-light of day still lingering in the sky! Canst thou sing, Dorcas, that divine hymn in which Hesiod celebrates the kind god, Hesperus?"

"Nay," replied Dorcas, "for I was never taught the classic melodies of Greece and Rome; but I can sing a pretty little song which, Epa-

phras saith, was a favorite with my mother, and which, he saith also, is a translation, or rather an imitation, of the Greek poet's sweetest hymn."

"Dorcas, sing thou that song for me!"

Then the girl sang, to a low, soothing melody, the following words:

"O Hesperus, that burnest bright
As gems upon the brow of night!
Thou bringest weary toil, oppressed
By labor and by sorrows, rest,
And sleep, the comforter.

"Thou bringest cattle to the stall;
Sheep to the fold, men to the hall;
The wild bird to her leafy nest,
The babe unto the mother's breast,
The ship to havens safe!

"Thou bringest dew unto the flowers,
And coolness to the glowing hours;
To peaceful homes fond thoughts, that prove
How sweet is tender human love,
And confidence and trust!

"O Hesperus! as thy mellow light
Soothes, blesses, glorifies the night,
So may our faith in Him, whose care
Preserves thy large and gleaming sphere.
Preserve our spirits pure!

“Raise Thou our hopes and trust above!
Shed on our hearts, like dew, Thy love!
From sin and selfishness set free,
Let us, O Lord, commune with Thee
In perfect faith and love!”

“Dorcas, I thank thee. It is very beautiful,” said Marcellus, drawing closer to the young girl upon the rustic bench upon which all three had been sitting before the departure of Varus. The centurion gazed into her beautiful face with eyes of infinite tenderness and longing, as he said, in the low tones of suppressed but passionate emotion:

“Why dost thou always shun me, Dorcas? During all the time thou hast made thine abode with us I have sought, but could never find, an opportunity to speak with thee alone; and even this evening I feared that thou wouldst leave me when the Vice-Prefect departed, as thou hast ever done. Why art thou so distant, cruel and hard with me? For if I were too bold and presumptuous with thee when we did first meet, thou shouldst forgive me, for I did not then know thee, and supposed that thou wert as other Roman maidens who would have been delighted to be so caressed. But, Dorcas, I honor thee more than any woman upon the earth, and thou must not be so hard and unfriendly.”

The young girl grew very pale beneath the sub-

tle fire in his pleading eyes and the tender music of his voice. She arose, however, and in the act of going, said very kindly:

"Centurion, I have never been unfriendly to thee. I have ever felt great kindness toward thee: nevertheless it had been proper for me to have left thee as soon as thy father departed, and I must do so now. Fare thee well!"

But as Dorcas turned away the young man seized her hands, and with very gentle but superior force drew her back into the seat beside him, saying:

"Nay, Dorcas, thou shalt not leave me so. I love thee, girl, with all my soul. By Venus Victrix and all other gods I swear that, of all women in the world, I care for thee only; and thou shalt have such honor and devotion of my heart as no other maiden in all Rome enjoyeth if thou canst love me, Dorcas. O dear one, love me! love me! love me!"

In an ecstasy of passion and longing he threw his arms around the trembling girl, drew her to his throbbing heart and pressed his burning lips to hers. It was a sore trial for the youthful girl. For one brief, exquisite moment she yielded to the imperious power of love that submerged her being like a bath of flame, while all her heart yearned for the affection of the rare and glorious youth who wooed her with such passionate devo-

tion. But instantly the relentless sense of right and of duty crushed down her yearning heart, and, gently disengaging herself from his passionate embrace, she spake in tones from which even her resolute and chastened will vainly strove to shut out the vibrant trill of tenderness that would make itself heard in every syllable:

“Nay, nay, centurion; this cannot be! Farewell, Marcellus! This can never be!”

“But why not, Dorcas? Yea,” he cried, with all his soul shining in his burning eyes, “thou dost love me, Dorcas; thou canst not lie to me, thou dearest girl! Thou canst not gaze into mine eyes and say, ‘I love thee not!’ Try it, Dorcas. Look thou upon me, and answer truthfully from thy heart, Dost not thou love me, Dorcas?”

She had never learned to lie; she could not do so; she felt that the young man’s tender, pleading voice and eyes extorted the confession from her lips, and, gazing upon him with the seriousness of an infinite affection, she replied:

“Yea, Marcellus, it is even true, I love thee dearly; I love thee with my soul.” Then, with inexpressible sadness, she continued: “Now, thou dear Marcellus, let me go hence. It is all over; this is the end of all; I have told thee that it cannot, cannot be. Farewell!”

“Nay,” he cried, exulting in the triumph that

had wrung from her lips that full confession of her love, and holding fast her little hands in both of his, "thou shalt not go. If thou dost love me, why say 'It cannot be'?" By all the gods of Rome, thou shalt be mine! Why talkest thou so sadly and so foolishly? I am young and wealthy and honorable, and I will devote my life to thy happiness. Respect and love and every indulgence and elegance that rank and wealth can yield thee shall be thine. Think of thy hard and lonely life, dear Dorcas, with its privations, its unending toil, its social solitude and occlusion from all that is bright and joyous and beautiful in life! Think of the half-servile station which degradeth thee, and then think that with me there is naught the gods can give which thou shalt lack. O beautiful and beloved Dorcas, if thou lovest me even a little, it is mere madness and folly to say, 'It cannot be.' Come thou to me, love! Be mine!"

"Nay," said the girl softly. "Permit me to depart, centurion. I tell thee that it is impossible. I do love thee dearly, and I hope thou wilt not doubt that I have bestowed upon thee my first and only love, which shall be thine forever. But, much as I admire and love thee, I tell thee truly that I would welcome any form of death rather than remain with thee as thou wishest. It is impossible, it cannot be. Farewell!"

But he held her hands fast, exclaiming:

"There was never such a maiden in the world as thou. Thou lovest me, and thou knowest that my very heart is thine; and yet thou dost reject all that my ardent affection is praying to bestow upon thee; and thou preferrest poverty and toil and self-denial, and even death itself, without me, to pleasure, ease and elegance in my loving arms; and thou dost starve both of our hearts! It is most cruel, unnatural, inexplicable! I desire to know, and have the right to know, the reason, if there can be any reason, for this course of thine, which every girl in Rome would surely censure as most unjust and cruel! Or dost thou wound me so bitterly and thine own heart through mere womanly vanity and perverseness without a cause?"

Then stood she up most pale and resolute. She knew well the feelings and opinions of that great Roman world to which the youth belonged, and understood perfectly that her refusal to accept as her lover the only man she loved, who was so passionately attached to her, must seem to him to be, as he had said, cruel, unnatural and inexplicable. And so, pressing her hands upon her heart to still its mighty anguish, she gazed into his eyes with a mournful tenderness, saying:

"Thou dear and noble Marcellus, think not I would refuse thee for any trivial cause, or for any cause that is not stronger and more imperious to

my soul than is the love of life or the fear of death. Friend, that life which thou desirest me to lead is to me unpardonable sin and shame. Thou canst not understand it so, perhaps, but I deny thee as I would do if the words should tear my heart up by the roots, because I am a Christian."

Then strange, tumultuous changes swept like storms across his soul and left their shadows on his face. His first glance at her upon her making this damning avowal of her faith in Christ was one of utter loathing and contempt, as if she had said, "I am a leper." But the girl stood there so quiet, submissive, beautiful; so full of sorrow for the pain she had given him, and he loved her so much that this first impulse of horror quickly faded out, and the old, passionate yearning for her assumed a momentary sway, only to be succeeded by a tempestuous rage.

"A Christian!" he said, almost gnashing his teeth in his convulsive passion. "One of the accursed sect that hates the world. And thinkest thou, girl, that I am weak and purposeless enough to suffer the hideous teachings of this outcast and criminal association to doom thee and myself to life-long sorrow? No, Dioscuri! No! by all the shining gods of heaven! by all the kind and pitiful daimons that people earth and air! by all the dark divinities that reign in hell, thou shalt be mine! I

will reclaim thee from this baleful superstition, and bring thee back into the way of reason and of nature! Even for thine own sweet sake, Dorcas, even by force if thou refuse, within this hour thou shalt offer sacrifice to Venus; or I will summon the lictors and have thee dragged before the magistrates and punished, as thou hast no doubt heard the Christian girls are punished by the Emperor. Prepare thy mind, Dorcas. I love thee too tenderly to leave thee in the power of this accursed sect. I go now to make ready fit sacrifices to the beautiful goddess, and straightway will return to teach thee her amiable and delightful service; and so reclaim thee, at least, from this malignant superstition of the Christians."

Then turned he, and in all the hurry of extreme agitation, strode into the house.

With clasped hands and streaming eyes the young girl for a moment stood looking up into the wide and starry heaven, as if she hoped to find somewhere in its depths sublime the God of the fatherless; then she sped diagonally across the inclosure in front of the villa to the corner of the stone wall which fenced off the premises from the highway; placed her hands upon the top of the wall, and lightly swung her agile form first to the top and thence down into the Appian Way, upon which magnificent Roman road, the grounds of Varus fronted.

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CHAPTER V

IN WHICH DORCAS HEARETH THE STORY OF FAUSTINA

LIGHTLY and swiftly the maiden Dorcas sped along the splendid road, which was almost deserted at that hour of the night, looking neither to the right nor to the left, nor pausing even a moment on her breathless journey, mile after mile, until she reached a point at which her way left the road and turned off abruptly into a tangled maze of brambles, underbrush and trees that marked the site of a former villa, long since destroyed, and left to that luxuriant vegetation which hides the rough face of desolation and decay. In the very heart of this wild waste she came to a fragment of ancient stucco work, that seemed once to have constituted part of the wall of a cellar or cistern, and passing by this she found an opening in the side of the adjacent hill, into which she stepped without a moment's hesitation. Dorcas had trodden the same road every Seventh day since she first went to the villa of the Vice-Prefect Varus, and the utter darkness into which she entered now was pleasant as one's return to a beloved home.

Not far from the entrance she groped about with her hands until she found a certain stone for which she sought, and, lifting it, she saw the welcome radiance of a diminutive lamp, whose delicate shaft of flame was always kept alive in that hidden crypt; and by this lamp she lighted one of many others that were carefully deposited in the same secret receptacle, and then, having carefully replaced the stone in its proper place, she took her lamp in her hand, and resumed her lonely journey. The place she was in was a gallery cut out of the rock, about eight feet high by perhaps ten feet in width, the length of which seemed to be interminable. Furlong after furlong she continued on her way, now turning into other galleries that opened into that which she had first entered, treading the labyrinth of the vast catacombs with as little hesitation as if she had dwelt in their solitude and darkness all her life. She was alone, except for the unknown and countless dead whose mortal remains slept peacefully in narrow crypts cut into the rocky sides of the galleries in irregular rows, one over another, like the windows in a dove-cote. Dorcas had walked a long distance, but at last reached a point where the walls of several intersecting galleries had been cut away in every direction, forming a room having capacity to accommodate even several hundred people upon the wooden benches that occupied the floor.

There was also a low platform upon the eastern side of this room, with a small wooden table upon it and a larger table standing in front of it. Such was the chapel in which the persecuted Christians of that age celebrated the ceremonies of their illegal and proscribed faith.

Having crossed this primitive chapel, the girl went on a short distance into another gallery and paused; and, having placed her lamp upon the stony floor, she sank down upon her knees, and burst into an agony of tears, while her slight form shook with sobs of passionate sorrow, and her heart all vainly sought for peace in prayer. The crypt or sepulcher at which she kneeled was closed up by a slab of white marble, upon which some loving hand had cut an inscription like to that shown in the opening chapter of this history.

How long the young girl had been kneeling here in anguish and in prayer she did not know, but it must have been morning in the upper world when, with grave, sedate steps, a tall and handsome man, somewhat past the meridian of life, passed quietly along the gallery, and seeing first the lamp-light and then the kneeling girl, he paused, and laying his hand lightly upon her drooping head, spoke in low and loving tones these words:

"Grief, the refiner, that cometh unto all, hath come early unto thee, my daughter. Remember thou that He chasteneth whom He loveth, and

scourgeth every one whom He instructeth; and thou shouldst lift up thy soul to Him, having known, even from thine infancy, that He doeth all things well."

"O Father Epaphras, it is a sorrow greater than I can bear. Even my prayers rise not, but fall back to the cruel earth like a poor bird with broken wing. Would to God that I had never left this quiet holy place."

"No chastening for the present seemeth good, but grievous rather; yet afterwards it worketh out the peaceable fruits of righteousness. But come thou, Dorcas, into the chapel, and tell me all thy sorrow."

Then she rose up and meekly followed him; and, having set their lamps upon the table, they twain seated themselves upon a bench, and, in a voice broken repeatedly by sobs of grief, she told the presbyter Epaphras of her recent trouble with Marcellus without reserve, not omitting even to state the passionate embrace and kisses he had given her, and her own transient but boundless joy at the discovery of her love for him.

Every Seventh day since she had been at the villa Dorcas had passed in the catacombs with certain holy women, who made their home somewhere in its vast and gloomy recesses, among whom, indeed, she had been reared and taught; and she had always attended the services in the

chapel, and, after services were over, she had always waited to converse with him, and had kept him informed of almost every incident of her life while there. So that while Epaphras was fully prepared for the story of the passionate love the young centurion had declared for Dorcas, he was not at all prepared for any such possibility as that Dorcas might reciprocate his love; for, indeed, the maiden had not herself known it until that evening, and her confession thereof filled him with sorrow and surprise.

“And thou lovest this proud Roman, the enemy of thy friends and of thy Lord?”

“Yea, father, all my heart runs out to him, as waters seek the sea! He is so good and noble, that if he only knew the truth he would not hesitate to give up his life therefor! But alas! alas! he does not know!”

“Thou must abide here in the catacombs for a long time to come,” said Epaphras. “The liberal donations Varus gave to thee were a most welcome contribution to the treasury of the church, that suffereth so grievously from the persecution which Diocletian began, and which Maxentius continueth; but if it were ten thousand times as much, thou shouldst not place thyself for one hour in this heathen’s power to gain it. Thou shalt remain here, and shalt not go forth again unless I may even find some other home for thee. The Vice-

Prefect Varus is an honorable man, but there are few like him in this heathen Rome; and thou shalt go to none whom I do not thoroughly know and trust. But thou art now a woman, Dorcas, and the first sorrow of thy life hath come upon thee. It is fitting that I tell thee of thy mother, Faustina, whose last resting-place thou knowest, and if thou wilt take to heart her glorious example, thou shalt be fortified to overcome the temptations of the world, the devil and the flesh.

“Thy mother was the daughter of the Cimbrian chieftain Segestus, whom thy grandmother, his wife, did follow to Rome when Germanicus brought him hither to grace his triumph after the manner of the Romans. Thy mother was thus born in Rome; and when she had grown up to womanhood in the faith of Jesus, she was married to the youthful presbyter Eugenius. He was martyred by the Jews of Celicia when on a journey to Jerusalem, at the time that thou wast one year old; yet, spite of earthly sorrows, she gloried in his death. A year after that, when certain Christians of our community were called to martyrdom in the Circus Maximus, thy mother Faustina insisted upon going to witness the glorious spectacle and see for herself how faith can triumph even over death. We did fear that the scene might unduly agitate one who had been physically delicate ever since the news of thy fa-

ther's martyrdom had come to us; and when we found that she would not be dissuaded, we solemnly warned her that the slightest expression of sympathy for those who were called upon to suffer for their Lord, or the slightest condemnation of those who persecuted them, might subject her to the like trial at the hands of the jealous Romans. Then she and other Christians mingled with the crowd that had collected to witness the departure of our brethren on their way sublime. When the executioners approached their bound victims they began to chant the glorious words of Paul, 'O grave, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?' And almost at the moment that the fatal blows descended upon them, the young mother, standing beside me, on the edge of the crowd, shouted in a clear, triumphant voice, whose sweet and solemn cadence filled the vast space around: 'Thanks be to God, which giveth them the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!'

"Almost immediately a centurion cried out: 'This woman also calleth on the accursed Galilean!' and he rushed forward to seize her. Then said I unto her: 'Give me thy child, Faustina!' Then the centurion haled her before the magistrates who had come to witness the enforcement of their judgment, saying: 'This woman hath now called upon God and Christ here in the presence of the magistrates and of the soldiers;' and when

they questioned her concerning the same, she boldly avowed her faith in Jesus. Then said the chief magistrate unto her: 'If thou wilt lodge with this centurion to-night, and in the morning make thy sacrifice to Venus, thou may'st live; if not, thou shalt die!'

"Then answered thy mother: 'I prefer the sword to the centurion, and death rather than idolatry; nor need thou delay, for I do love and worship Christ both now and to-morrow.'

"Then ordered they the centurion to lead Faustina to the executioners, and as they were crossing the open space between, I swiftly stepped forward and said to the centurion: 'This is the woman's babe; may she not bid the child farewell?' Then the Roman halted them that were with him, and thy mother did kiss thee, and did make the sign of the cross upon thee, and while she was doing this she turned away from the centurion, and I said unto her: 'Faustina, dost thou desire the Anastasis?'

"And with a smile she answered: 'Nay, but to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better! Care thou and our community for the babe!'

"Then I perceived of a truth that she had come thither in order to go hence by the sacred way, as so many of our people also have done, until the church forbade us to seek for martyrdom.

“And so she went forward chanting the psalm of victory, and with a sword those men struck off her head.

“Thou wilt see upon her tomb the Hebrew word ‘Shalom,’ which signifieth peace. Thou wilt see the green branch, signifying everlasting life. Thou wilt see the symbol of martyrdom, and next to it the urn, signifying Christian burial. For soon as the night had fallen certain of the brethren with me bore the body of the martyr hither. The slab which thou hast read I cut out even with mine own hand, and the inscription thereon. For, lo! I did love thy mother much and tenderly.”

And the great tears welling up from the presbyter’s soft eyes, and his broken, sobbing voice, attested the depth and deathlessness of that great love.

“I have told thee of these things at this time,” said the presbyter, “because I would have thee, O daughter of martyrs, cast out of thy sinless heart this love for the proud Roman! Arise, my child, and go in peace, and may the peace of God go with thee!”

Then arose Dorcas meekly, and, bending over the presbyter, kissed she his forehead with mighty tenderness and reverence; and, taking up her lamp, she passed out of the chapel, seeking the more hid-

den recesses of the vast necropolis wherein abode the holy women.

Then the presbyter kneeled down and struggled woefully in prayer, and at last the sorrow of his burdened heart broke forth into a wail of limitless anguish:

“O Lion of the tribe of Judah,” cried he, “give me of thy strength and courage, for I am desolate and sore afflicted. Thou didst call the mother whom I loved unto thyself by the quick way of martyrdom; and now the daughter, whom I have carried a lamb in my bosom all these lonely years, this cruel Roman hath stolen out of my yearning heart, and human nature in me suffers more than death! Impart to me thine aid divine!”

Long wrestled he with that sore grief, but peace at last fell on him — peace that passeth all understanding — peace that floweth as a river — and rising to his feet once more, his grand and holy face less lighted by the little lamp he bore than by the radiance that beamed forth from his pure, exalted soul, the presbyter went quietly and gravely on his way.

CHAPTER VI

THE SWADDLING-BANDS OF ANTI-CHRIST

IN the spring of the year 312, Constantine, who, after his father's death, had been proclaimed Emperor by the Roman legions then in Britain, and had, after coming into Gaul, received the homage of the army in that country, made his imperial residence and army headquarters at Lutetia. To him came deputies from Rome, representing that the people of Italy were secretly opposed to the tyrant Maxentius, who then was Emperor at Rome, and beseeching him to come to Rome and free them from that despotism by assuming his own rightful sovereignty over Italy.

"We represent, O mighty Constantine, almost every class in Italy, and by far the greater part of the people, and in their names we implore thee to march to the Imperial City, both because the people hate Maxentius and because of their great love and loyalty to thee."

Constantine the Great, then in the bloom and freshness of his manhood, was perhaps the handsomest Roman that ever wore the purple, and also the most astute politician of his age; a man fitted

by nature for the greatest destiny; brave, hardy, temperate, self-poised and ambitious, knowing the very hearts of men.

To these delegates he replied in calm and dignified terms, in which firmness and kindness were equally blended:

“Patricians! Senators! the message which ye have brought, perhaps at great peril to your own safety, is marvelously gratifying to me, that desire only the glory and happiness of the Romans. Ye are, therefore, welcome, both because of your own love and loyalty, and also because of your assurances that ye utter the suppressed voice of Rome, and of all Italy; but yet I will deal with you candidly, even as your loyalty deserves.

“To march upon Rome under existing circumstances would be only to bring upon beautiful Italy the horrors of a civil war, and so harass mine own people, and destroy mine own heritage. This I desire to avoid; this I have no heart to do.

“The love and loyalty of the people (which you so confidently promise), unorganized and undisciplined, is not a force that can avail, either to avert the calamities of war, or to render the war brief and decisive. The information I desire, ye have not given; and that which ye have brought, although agreeable news indeed, is only a pleasing sentiment, and not a living and available force.”

“Most royal Augustus,” said the spokesman of

the delegates, "what information more than we have given does thy superior wisdom desire?"

"I wish to be advised whether there is any one class of the Roman people, having common hopes and interests enough to give them unity and coherence of purpose and of action, and organization enough to understand and to work in unison for a common end, upon whom I can rely, with good hope, that when the power of Maxentius is once overthrown they can prevent it from rallying again. I will have no protracted war in Italy to waste the fairest portion of mine empire and distress my loyal people."

"Alas!" said the ambassador, "beautiful Italy is rent by factions, and no such body of men as thou desirest can anywhere be found. All those who care more for their native land than for their own private schemes for selfish advancement or revenge, turn their eyes to thee, and will hail thy coming with gladness, although they know that the only road to peace lies through the bloody fields of civil war."

"Then," said Constantine, calmly and deliberately, "ye must organize such a body. I will not march on Rome until ye shall have done so. But ye must accomplish this work speedily, or I will seize upon the only alternative that remains to me — a measure so radical and heroic that the adoption thereof will shake the whole fabric of the empire

to its lowest foundations. So that ye must return and organize such a body of men as I have designated, and give me sure means to gain their confidence and aid, or I will —”

Constantine did not then complete the sentence, but gazed around the whole circle of the delegates with calm and searching eyes. Then, after a long pause, he continued: “Or I will invite the slaves to join my standard and supply mine army, and will manumit every man who does so with alacrity — him, and his family, and their descendants forever.”

A thrill of absolute horror passed over the assembly at this proposal, that was as novel as it was daring.

Thereupon the Emperor enjoined upon them to set out for Rome on the next day, and proceed immediately to organize, in every city, town and hamlet, a body of men such as he had desired; and having given orders for their proper entertainment, he dismissed the delegates with royal grace and dignity.

These delegates at once perceived that Constantine thoroughly comprehended the political status of the empire, and had determined upon the course he would pursue. The broken communications which they were enabled to hold with each other while upon the road did not enable them to arrive at any satisfactory conclusion, and they finally

agreed that before passing the confines of Gaul, beyond which it would be necessary for them to separate and take different routes to Rome, in order to escape the notice of the officers of Maxentius, they would meet in solemn conclave, and devote a day to the discussion of the momentous duties devolved upon them by the orders of Constantine; and to consider the fearful alternative which he would accept if they should disregard the imperial mandate.

The day came quickly, and, in a secluded valley at the foot of the Alps, they met and called upon the oldest and highest of their number to preside over their deliberations; and upon taking his station, the president invited every one to speak who had any counsel to offer upon the matter which so deeply concerned them and the Roman State.

During several hours, one after another rose, and, little by little, the business was considered in every possible ramification; and the general opinion seemed to be settling down into the conclusion that it was impossible for them, or any others, to organize such a body as their chosen emperor desired, without their attempt to do so coming to the knowledge of Maxentius; and that the coming of such knowledge to the ear of that cruel tyrant would be the signal for death and confiscation unto all of them and all their friends. They further thought that if Constantine should dare to issue a

proclamation of freedom to the slaves, that act would consolidate all the freemen of Italy against him, and render a hopeful cause absolutely hopeless; and that even a victory, gained by means so desperate and so contrary to all the law and sentiment of the empire, would be worse for them than a defeat. That the demand of the Emperor was unreasonable, his alternative too horrible to contemplate, and that self-preservation would require them to withdraw the invitation they had given him to march upon Rome, and endeavor to make their peace with Maxentius.

This, perhaps, would have been the resolution reached, but before a vote could be taken upon it a man who had hitherto kept silent, and who, indeed, was unknown to all except one or two of the delegates, rose and began to address them in tones so singularly musical and persuasive that from the very beginning of his remarks all eyes were directed toward him, and all ears turned to catch his words; and thus he spake:

“Patricians! Senators! A poor scholar of Cæsarea, that hath never mingled in any public affairs, nor hath held office under the empire—who, indeed, hath only joined himself to your illustrious company by the partiality of personal friendship in one of your number—would not be presumptuous enough to claim your attention if it had not already become too plainly appar-

ent that the wisdom of those who have given counsel hath failed to point out any reasonable solution of the difficulties that seem to hem us in on every side. But, while inferior in rank, learning, and intelligence, to even the least among you, his studious life hath been devoted to learning the history of nations and of men; and, for a long time past, it hath been his purpose especially to investigate and understand the present condition of the Roman Empire. I am myself so poor as not to despise the poverty of others; so obscure as to feel a deep and abiding interest in even the humbler class of citizens; so ignorant as to be willing to learn of all. And, therefore, it happens that sources of information which ye could not see by reason of your elevation, socially and politically, above those regions of human life in which they most abound, have long been familiar to my sight and hearing.

“Patricians! Senators! I affirm, from long and careful observation, that there exists to-day in Rome, and throughout Italy, a body of men, more numerous than any one faction in the land, not inferior to any other in intelligence and virtue, comprising some of every grade of social and political life, but chiefly consisting of the lower and middle classes, all bound together by ties compared with which the military oath is weaker than a rope of sand; a body more compactly organized

than any legion, possessed of a common treasury, possessed of means of inter-communication more safe and speedy than the postal service of the empire; a body of men whom ye loathe and despise only because ye do not truly know them — I think, only because ye do not know them — in fact, a secret and thoroughly-organized society within the empire, that could, if it would, answer the purposes of Constantine more perfectly than any organization ye could devise by years of open, uninterrupted toil. Think ye it would be a work worth while to seek the aid of this wonderful community in the sore straits to which ye are now reduced? ”

Having so spoken the orator sat down, and immediately there was a great clamor, some crying, “ Who is he? Who is the orator? ” and others, “ Who are those men — the strange community of which he speaks? ”

But the speaker sat silent and apparently unconscious of the tumult which his words had caused, until the clamor wore itself out, and the president courteously arose, saying:

“ The assembled delegates desire to know who is this able and learned orator, and the name of that mysterious community to which he hath referred. Will the orator be kind enough to answer these requests? ”

Then rose up the same man again, and in a quiet and dignified manner responded:

"I am the poor scholar Eusebius, of Cæsarea, and the community of which I spoke is the Church of Jesus Christ — a people known and detested by the name of Christians."

A murmur of surprise, almost of indignation and contempt, ran through the whole assembly, and it seemed uncertain how this information would be received. Then a sour-faced, tall patrician rose, and in cynical tones addressed the delegates:

"This head is mine, but the most holy Emperor Maxentius wants it. I have some houses in Rome, some villas on the Arno, some estates in Spain, and the emperor wanteth these also. If he take off this head, the rest is his by law. Have ye also some heads? some houses? some villas? some estates? I am ready to take any road to save my head and my estates, even to setting free my thousand slaves; but slaves are property — Christians are not. I therefore say, better the Christians than the slaves! All that I know of this mysterious people leads me to give entire credence to the statement ye have heard as to the numbers and organization of their communities. But the orator hath said that they could give the Emperor all the aid he needs if they would. That sounds strange, indeed! Surely if this supposed

criminal association, that hath been pursued and punished for three centuries, were promised protection for the future, they ought gladly to promise, and to give their aid, their very lives, if need be, to the Emperor! For mine own part, I am ready to advocate a law allowing them to build a temple on the Capitoline Hill, and raise Christ's statue in the Pantheon, if they can give us such indispensable assistance. Surely a god the more or less in Rome is a matter of much smaller consequence to men of brains than are the lives and property of all of us and thousands more, who hope no good thing of Maxentius. I therefore say again: Better the Christians than the slaves! "

And this remark seemed to be caught as a keynote that gave direction to the sentiment of all, and soon there was a unanimous cry of: "Better the Christians than the slaves! "

Thereupon many expressed a desire to hear Eusebius declare his opinion as to how and upon what terms the aid of the Christians might be secured, and, at their solicitation, he rose once more.

"Patricians! Senators! From long and careful study and observation of the Christian community (or, rather communities, for each congregation seems to constitute an independent democracy), I am of opinion that it would be a work of

great difficulty and delicacy to induce them to take sides with the emperor, or take sides at all, in the impending war; but I have no hesitation in saying that, if they can be led to do so, the overwhelming weight of their numbers and influence would reduce the whole war to one single battle, which would, of course, be necessary to destroy the army of the Emperor Maxentius; for, if defeated, it would be impossible for him to raise another force. The difficulties in the way are very great, and arise out of the fact that the religion, to which they cling with a steadfast and immovable tenacity that despises tortures and death, is, in some remarkable particulars, directly in conflict with the laws and customs of the empire. Christianity is a pure, unmixed democracy, based upon faith. This religion absolutely forbids them to bear arms, and their history shows that during three hundred years no body of Christians has undertaken to defend itself against even the grossest injustice, and no individual Christian hath ever raised a weapon, even in defense of the religion for which he would not hesitate to die. They are also forbidden by their religion to own a slave; and from this fact it happens that the number of the freemen is so rapidly increasing everywhere. The religion also forbids them to acquire, hold, or transmit, any private property

beyond their daily bread, and they include in the term 'property' not only estates real and personal, but also offices, prerogatives and privileges of birth or rank. They hold their property in common, and regard all laws which recognize private rights as Mammon-worship — the most wicked and abominable crime. They also regard marriage as a sacrament of religion, and consider the Roman laws of divorce as sinful and invalid. The whole purpose of their strange faith and practice for three hundred years hath been to secure the absolute fraternity of all who believe, to abrogate all social and political distinctions between man and man, and between different classes of men, making the family the sole basis, and the church the sole superstructure, of society. To a community organized upon such principles as these, the observance of which is secured beyond the reach of human statutes or customs by their unwavering faith in future rewards and punishments, any alliance with a mighty empire, the whole social and political life of which is founded upon war, slavery, imperialism, aristocracy and property rights, would, at first blush, seem to be gross and unpardonable sacrilege. Yet, by cautious management, it might be arranged. I think that it might be arranged; and I would pledge my life that, if it can be done, the Emperor Con-

stantine can secure all the aid, in men and in resources of every kind, that he can possibly require."

After some further discussion and inquiry, it was agreed upon that some of them should return at once to Lutetia and communicate to the Emperor the facts imparted by Eusebius, and that the others should prosecute their journey to Rome, and open up communication with the Christians — a task which Eusebius undertook to facilitate, saying that he knew some among them even intimately well, and had such access to them as would enable him to maintain constant intercourse between them and the patricians and Senators who desired to win them over to the Emperor.

CHAPTER VII

WHICH SHOWETH HOW MARCELLUS CONDUCTED HIMSELF

WHEN the centurion turned away from Dorcas and hurried into the house, he had no misgiving as to the wisdom and propriety of the course which he had sworn to pursue, and being very thoroughly persuaded in his own mind that not only his own wishes, but also every dictate of reason, of humanity, and of affectionate regard for the beautiful maiden, required him to snatch her away, by force if need be, out of the hands of the odious and malignant Christians, compel her to sacrifice to Venus, and so place her beyond the reach of that atheistic and abominable sect. He doubted not that this was the wisest and best course for both of them; and his resolution to rescue the dear and beautiful girl from the pernicious influence of that blighting superstition was sustained both by the zeal of a missionary and by the passion of a lover. He, therefore, quickly prepared the poppy, the doves, and the myrtle and roses, which were customarily used in

making sacrifices to the foam-born goddess, and, having very quickly arranged all things to his own satisfaction, he hastened back to the spot at which he had left Dorcas but a few minutes before, and was overwhelmed with astonishment when he found that she had disappeared. Then he called her: "Dorcas! Dorcas!" Called more loudly: "Dorcas! Dorcas! Dorcas!" Called with might and main: "Dorcas! Dorcas! Dorcas!" until the clear, powerful, resonant cry rang out over the whole villa, and summoned the domestics even from the inmost recesses of the house; but still no answer came. Then to the thronging slaves whom his ringing voice had speedily collected, he said:

"The maiden Dorcas, whom I left here but a few minutes ago, hath strangely disappeared. Either she hath fled, or hath been abducted. Haste, all ye, in different directions, and seek and find her!"

But their search was futile. One by one, until far into the night, weary and disheartened, the slaves returned, and as they severally came home, the young centurion questioned each, and elicited every fact and conjecture gathered in the progress of the search, and then dismissed that one and waited impatiently for another. From all of these reports together the unhappy youth reached the conclusion that Dorcas had fled along the Appian

Way from the city and the villa, and that pursuit for the present would be unavailing. He doubted not that she had gone to place herself under the protection of some secret congregation of the hated Christians; and her declaration that she was one of that strange and impious sect explained to him her absence every Seventh day, a fact which both he and Varus had accounted for by their belief that she was accustomed to visit some synagogue of the Jews.

Hour after hour the restless and unhappy youth strode back and forth along the gravel walks until the dawn came stealing up the east, but no reflection served to quiet him, and no resolve seemed stable and reasonable enough for his mind to fix upon it, so that he could not determine what to do. The sudden breaking off of his pleasant association with Dorcas, that had been for months the chief source of his happiness, was worse than death. Only when he knew that she was gone — perhaps forever — did he fully realize how tyrannous a hold his love for her had taken on his heart and brain. He felt that if she had died beside him he could have endured the loss of her better that way, than to think of her still living, but not for him; still living, but beyond his reach; still living, but taught and trained to hate him by the secret and dreaded influence of the terrible superstition of the Christians — a demoniac creed

that outlawed human love, and hated all mankind!

"She would be mine own gladly and lovingly," he said, "but for the influence of that fearful and inhuman creed."

"There is none like her," he sobbed in his great anguish. "There is none like her; no, not one! I cannot live without thee, Dorcas; or, if I exist, life will be so lonely, maimed, and wretched, that death would be a welcome refuge. Come back to me, Dorcas; oh, come back!"

Then fiercer thoughts would seize his heart, and he would vent his bitter wrath against the hated Christians, "the enemies of the human race," "a cruel, malevolent and criminal association," "that had renounced the religion and ceremonies instituted by our fathers," that "had abandoned the way of reason and of nature," outlawing the divine love which the kind and gentle gods of Rome had planted in the human heart to compensate for the stings of adverse fate and beautify our earthly life.

A thousand impracticable schemes chased each other through his perturbed spirit and yielded no satisfying result, until, outworn with anxiety and grief, he threw himself upon his couch and for several hours forgot his wretchedness in sleep. Refreshed and calmed by his brief but dreamless slumber, he arose, and quietly started off on foot along

the Appian Way. By minute and systematic, yet seemingly careless, inquiries of those whom he met or saw in the adjacent gardens, orchards and fields, some of whom had often seen the beautiful young girl tripping along the road, and by comparing the information thus elicited with facts already within his knowledge, Marcellus reached two very definite conclusions — first, that the Seventh-day journeys habitually made by Dorcas did not extend beyond a certain ruin, because beyond that point no one remembered to have even seen the girl; that at this point the young girl had been accustomed to leave the highway in the direction of a range of hills under which the abandoned villa had been situated, because upon the other side were cultivated lands, through which she could not have gone every week for a year or more without being seen or known. This was not much, he thought, but it was something. He knew, that after leaving the Appian Way, Dorcas must have plunged at once into that tangled maze of underbrush, brambles, vines running wild upon the untrimmed trees, and all the luxuriant vegetation which in that semi-tropical climate soon conceals the harsher features of ruin and decay. This much his unflagging search had yielded him, and at nightfall he turned his footsteps homeward, resolved that upon the following morning he would explore the waste, and that not even the slightest

trace by which it might be possible to follow Dorcas should escape his anxious eyes.

On the next day, and the next, and day after day for more than a month, he spent in that solitude every hour that he could spare from necessary duties, exploring the grounds foot by foot until he could recognize, like the faces of familiar friends, every tree and vine and shrub, and even the most minute and indistinguishable features of the earth and of its various growths; but nothing came of it. He was discouraged, almost hopeless, but determined never to relinquish the search until he had discovered Dorcas, or had learned whither she had gone.

The youth grew thin and haggard with this unremitting anxiety and grief. His looks and movements became nervous — almost jerky; he lost the calm, self-poised grace and dignity which characterizes the officers of a Roman Legion, and the men of action of every race and clime, so that no busy dreamer, whose mind wears out his body, could have his physical beauty more greatly marred.

The Vice-Prefect Varus had been troubled and annoyed beyond measure by the abrupt disappearance of his beautiful and accomplished assistant, and he had elicited from the young centurion, by persistent questioning, nearly all that had occurred between himself and Dorcas. Of course he con-

demned the maiden as one deluded by the malevolent superstition of the Christians, blinded to her own good and to all that pertained thereto, and insensible to the right and duties which she owed to himself and to his only son, and his bitter hatred towards that odious sect grew stronger and more unrelenting as he daily marked the havoc which disappointment was making in the health and spirits of his son. He would not have hesitated to set the whole police force of the city upon her track, nor, if she had been found, would he have hesitated to deliver her up, bound hand and foot, to the centurion; but he knew that it was almost useless, in any case, to pursue a Christian who had fled in order to escape the vengeance of the Roman laws, it being well established by his own experience and by the traditions and official records of his office that any Christian who wanted to do so could disappear as effectually as if the earth had opened and had swallowed him up, never to be recaptured, except by merest accident. Those who believed everything attributed this well-known fact to witch-craft and "the strong magic" of the sect; those who believed nothing accounted for it by the conjecture that the Christians had a perfect, secret organization among themselves, and hiding places unknown to, and undiscoverable by, the Roman authorities. Varus, therefore, thought that it would be not only a waste of time, but also

a great annoyance, involving an injurious notoriety for the young centurion, to institute an official search for the missing maiden. In this opinion Marcellus fully coincided; but he would not abandon either the hope he cherished of some day finding Dorcas nor the ceaseless effort he was making for that purpose.

In vain the Vice-Prefect brought to bear upon him all the wise suggestions of his own philosophy; in vain he contrived to engage the young man in extra military duties and ever-changing amusements, seeking to rouse his interest in his profession, or to get him committed to licentious pleasures; nothing could wean him from his love for Dorcas, nor from his determination to discover her again; and the Vice-Prefect, finally realizing the fact that a great, strong, earnest nature absorbed by any master passion soon passes beyond the reach of all philosophical treatises, and calmly sacrifices even its own lusts, ambitions and vanities, left the young man to his own resources, hoping that with the lapse of time, the buoyancy of youth would cure him of a seemingly fatal passion.

CHAPTER VIII

JUSTICE TO A CHRISTIAN AFTER THE HIGH ROMAN FASHION

HEART-SORE, disconsolate, indifferent to all his usual pleasures and pursuits, the young centurion was one day wandering about the headquarters of the Prefect of the city, which was the usual place for the administration of justice. While he was lounging listlessly about, seeking some way "to kill time," his attention was enlisted by hearing the Vice-Prefect who that day sat for the trial of criminals, order the lictors "to bring forth the Christian."

He followed the lictors into the hall, and saw them place in the prisoner's dock the Christian who had just been brought up for examination; and Marcellus listened to the proceedings, because he had nothing else to do and was weary of the world.

"What is thy name?" asked the Vice-Prefect of the prisoner.

"My name is Lucanius."

"Thine age."

"Forty years."

"Thy place of residence?"

"Near Rome, beyond the Tiber."

"Thine occupation?"

"I am a dresser of vines and a gardener."

"Thou art brought before me charged with the crime of being a Christian. Dost thou comprehend the nature of the accusation?"

"I believe I do so fully."

"Art thou guilty or not guilty?"

"I am a Christian, but am not guilty."

"Thou art accused of belonging to the infamous and pestilent sect, the vile and criminal association, denominated Christians; what plea dost thou make for thyself?"

"Most honorable Roman, I do not know of any vile or criminal association whatever. I am verily a Christian, but I have done no crime. Is there any such thing as murder, robbery, larceny, lying, cheating or fraud, or any immoral or unworthy conduct, charged against me by any one? If so, I plead not guilty. I am a Christian, but have violated no law of the city or of the empire!"

"Stretch forth thy right hand," said the Vice-Prefect.

Lucanius did so, and it was manifest that the thumb of his right hand had been amputated.

"So," cried the officer, "thou art one of the 'Thumbless!' Where is thy thumb? Didst

thou not cut off thy thumb in order to avoid military service due to the most holy emperor (as so many of the same pusillanimous and pernicious sect have done)? And yet thou sayest that 'thou has violated no law of the empire!'"

"Verily," answered Lucianus, "I did amputate this thumb in order to avoid military service; for the law of Christ doth not suffer a Christian to bear arms. But the Roman law does not require a thumbless man to bear arms, so that this thing, done for conscience' sake long years ago, is not a violation of the law."

"Art thou a Roman, and yet dost not know that the first duty of a Roman is to bear arms in behalf of his country? Or art thou a coward and a slave thus ignominiously to maim thyself?"

"There was no law forbidding any Roman to cut off his thumb if he had cause to do so, and I had good cause enough."

"I asked thee art thou a coward? Art thou afraid?" said the Vice-Prefect angrily.

Then said the Christian mildly: "Most honorable Roman, I do not think that I would be afraid to die, but I would be afraid to put another man to death. 'Thou shalt not kill,' is the law of God; and the fact that an emperor, or some other man, might order me to perpetrate the crime, can furnish no excuse for my conscience. I might face death, perhaps, as quietly as other men do

— for personal courage is the lowest and commonest virtue of mankind, if it be a virtue — but I would not inflict death or wounds on any man that lives.”

“So, so!” murmured the Vice-Prefect. “These Christians will not fight, not even to defend themselves against injustice; not even in defense of the superstition for which they do not fear to die!”

Then in a louder tone he continued: “Dost thou know the edict of the most holy Emperor Maxentius concerning the odious Christians?”

“Yea,” said Lucanius, “I have heard the law!”

“And thou knowest that the law requires me to put thee to torture until thou deny this Christ and burn incense to some god of Rome; or until thou confess the secret purposes and designs of this accursed and criminal association, which have hitherto baffled all inquiry of the government; or until I am satisfied that thou art hopelessly obdurate and blinded by this pernicious superstition.”

“Yea,” answered the Christian calmly, “such, indeed, do I suppose to be thy duty and thy purpose; nor do I blame thee, noble Roman, although I would that the law were not so cruel and unjust. Let me solemnly declare unto thee (as I suppose others have often done before) that the only reason the government hath always failed, and must

always fail, to discover any secret, criminal purpose or design of the Christian communities, is because they have no such design or purpose. There is nothing secret in Christianity, except that so long as we are persecuted by the law we hold it as a matter of conscience and of brotherly love not to betray the brethren."

"I have heard all that before," said the Vice-Prefect harshly. "Thou knowest the law; wilt thou now curse this Christ, and burn incense to Jupiter, without the torture, and so save thyself intolerable pain?"

"Nay!" said Lucanius quietly; "not for any tortures that thou canst inflict, God helping me!"

"Take him, lictors! With the thumb-screws crush ye the remaining fingers of the hand which he hath mutilated, one after the other, and report thou to me his behavior!"

Then seized they him, and hurried him into an adjoining chamber, whence soon came the moanings of intolerable anguish shuddering through the hall. Then the man's voice was heard, exclaiming:

"O Jesus, Saviour, strengthen me!"

Then soon afterward came in the lictors, and reported to the magistrate, saying:

"Vice-Prefect, we crushed two fingers, and then ordered the Christian to recant, whereupon he began to call upon Jesus; and then we crushed the

two remaining fingers, and the man endured it not, but fainted dead away."

"Bring him hither!" said the Vice-Prefect.

Then they brought back Lucanius, and already he looked weak and old and haggard. Then the Vice-Prefect fixed his eyes upon the man, and said:

"Thou hast tasted of the thumb-screws, Christian, and thou remainest obstinate; but we have yet the rack, that giveth torture compared with which that which thou hath suffered is but child's play. Wilt thou recant or not?" Then answered Lucanius:

"Most honorable Roman, I knew not whether I could endure this agony, and did greatly fear that the fierce pain might force me to dishonor Christ; but now I know. I praise God that hath strengthened me to suffer all things which thou thinkest thy duty requireth thee to afflict me with. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, Amen!"

"It is enough," said the magistrate to the licitors. "This kind never yield, and farther question would be useless cruelty. Keep ye him safely until sunrise to-morrow; give him to eat and drink, and in the morning ye shall release him from custody without molestation."

Then the Christian bowed low, saying:

"I thank thee much, for thou art merciful, and

hast not pressed thy legal authority against me farther than thy duty doth require."

"Certainly not," said the Vice-Prefect. "A Roman officer must do his duty, without regard to any personal feeling of favor or of hatred. Thou hast borne thyself well, and thou wouldst be a worthy man if once set free from thine abominable superstition."

Then the lictors took him to his dungeon, to be confined until sunrise, as had been ordered.

Then said the Vice-Prefect:

"Bring in the girl!"

And the lictors brought before him Phœbe, the daughter of Lucanius, "charged with the crime of being a Christian;" and the maiden being placed in the prisoner's dock, her examination proceeded as in the former case, eliciting the fact that she was a Christian, of the age of twenty years, the daughter of the former prisoner.

The girl was a thorough Roman in every feature, and although her large and lustrous eyes betrayed her secret terror, she was calm and self-possessed, revealing in the patient quiet of her bearing the self-control that comes of long training in the direction of repressing all outward signs of emotion.

"Thou art young and comely, girl," said the Vice-Prefect, "and the fact that no indecorum is laid to thy charge except that thou hast embraced

the pestilent and inhuman superstition of the Christians, inclineth me to pity thee; but thou knowest that I must and will enforce the law against thee, unless thou come hither and upon the little altar there burn incense to the goddess Venus, denying this malignant Christ. Wilt thou not do so, maiden?"

"Nay, verily!"

"Dost thou know the law concerning the Christian maidens?"

"I do not!"

"From the days of the Emperor Nero until recently," said the Vice-Prefect, "those women who confessed their adherence to this pernicious sect were thrown to the lions or decapitated, or burned at the stake. But this ancient severity hath been relaxed by the more recent emperors, and, under the most holy Emperor Maxentius, they are, of mercy, no longer put to death. The law sends them not *ad leonem*, but *ad lenonem*."

"The emperor is mistaken in regard to clemency," said Phœbe, "for I, and every Christian girl, would prefer to go to the lions, rather than endure that of which thou speakest."

"But the law is more merciful unto thee than is thy malevolent and accursed superstition. I will give thee until sunset to consider of thy condition. If by that hour thou shalt consent to curse this Christ and burn the incense, thou mayst go

hence free; but if thou remainest obdurate, the law shall be enforced, whether thou wilt or not. Think thou well upon it. Lictors, take her to her dungeon!"

Then they led the girl into one of the dungeons of the place, and closed and shut the door upon her. The small, dark room contained only an iron couch, a chair, a small wooden table, on which there was a water jar and an earthen mug. The girl sank down upon her knees in silent, earnest prayer.

The Vice-Prefect remained engaged in the examination of other prisoners. He remarked that there was never any necessity for witnesses on the examination of those who were charged with the crime of Christianity, if the charge were true, because in all his experience he had never known one of them to deny the fact.

Just at sunset the Vice-Prefect ordered a lictor to inquire whether, after reflection upon the matter, the girl Phœbe was willing to save herself by denying Jesus and burning incense to the idol. The lictor reported that she quietly but obstinately refused to do either.

"Then the law must take its course," said the Vice-Prefect, and the young girl was led back to her dungeon and the door locked upon her. But Marcellus, obeying a sudden impulse, pressed forward, and, saluting the Vice-Prefect, asked that

he might be permitted to visit the Christian maiden's cell. The magistrate evinced some surprise that a young patrician should make such a request, but wrote the necessary order on a papyrus and directed a lictor to conduct the centurion to the prison.

And Marcellus went out following the lictor, and when they had reached the entrance to the dungeon the lictor delivered the order to the sentry on duty there, and thereupon the sentry opened the door and the centurion passed into the dungeon, and the door was closed.

CHAPTER IX

A FAIR CONTRACT FOR A PAGAN

WHEN the young centurion entered the cell of Phœbe, the girl instinctively drew away to that side of the room into which the fast fading light of day sifted through a small, narrow window that was well secured by transverse iron bars morticed deeply into the walls of solid stone. Observing the growing darkness of the dungeon, Marcellus rapped on the heavy door with his sword-hilt, and when the sentry answered, he said: "Bring thou a lamp hither;" and soon the sentry opened the door and gave unto him a small lamp lighted, which the centurion placed upon the table. Then laying his sword across the table, he seated himself upon the only chair, and turning to the young girl, he said, in harsh and peremptory tones: "Come thou hither, and be seated upon this couch! I would talk with thee, and see thy face when thou dost answer!"

The frightened girl hesitated for a moment to obey him, and gazed appealingly into the young man's haggard but determined face. "Come thou hither," he said again, with sterner accents.

Then, preserving her self-possession by a mighty effort, she calmly came forward and took the seat upon the couch indicated by the gesture of his hand, near and immediately in front of him, with the lamp-light shining full upon her. The centurion turned his haggard face and gazed into her timid eyes long and earnestly, with a look as cruel and hard as any murderer's visage ever wore, and then, in tones husky with some strong but suppressed passion, he said: "Thou art a Christian, and thou knowest the sentence passed upon thee; but I would know more of the accursed and criminal association to which thou dost belong — and I will question thee. If thou dost answer me truthfully and promptly, without any equivocation or evasion, I will show thee respect and kindness; if thou dost lie to me, or if thou dost prevaricate, or if thou refuse to answer, or if thou dost seek to conceal anything of which I ask thee, I will in no way stand between thee and the sentence of the court. Wilt thou be truthful, direct, and without deceit, or not?"

His hard but feverish eyes were fixed unblenchingly upon those of the shrinking girl. But Phœbe calmly answered: "I thank God, Roman, this night, that there is no act of all my life that needeth to be concealed. There is nothing in the faith of a Christian but what all men are invited and earnestly exhorted to know and examine for them-

selves. Thou canst put no question to me, centurion, which I need hesitate to answer truthfully and unreservedly, either concerning my own poor life, if thou dost wish to examine that, or concerning our pure, peaceful, harmless, and glorious religion, except that I will not betray any who are known to me to be Christians; nor will I reveal unto thee any sign or word by which the persecuted recognize each other. Except these two things, ask what thou wilt, and I will answer thee truly, directly, and intelligently, as far as my little knowledge may serve me."

"Dost thou belong to any organized body, or society, among the Christians?"

"Yea," answered Phœbe, "and have done so from infancy. I was raised up in the Church."

"Hast thou been accustomed to take part in the secret rites and ceremonies of these societies?"

"Assuredly," answered Phœbe; "but thou must know that there is nothing in the nature of secrecy in our Christianity. On the contrary, the Church would gladly hold all its services in the light of day — publicly — if the Roman law allowed it; only, while the persecution continues, we are compelled to worship in secret."

"What are your rites and ceremonies? What idolons or images do ye use in them? What do the Christians do in these assemblies?"

"It would take long to tell thee all intelligibly.

The principal ceremonies are Baptism, administered when one unites himself with one of our communities; the Supper of our Lord, consisting of a taste of consecrated bread and wine, used commonly once a week; singing, prayer, and preaching, in which the presbyters explain the Sacred Book, or exhort men to the observance of the precepts therein contained."

"I know something of all these things of which thou hast spoken, from hearing or reading the examinations of other Christians; but have they not secret rites, which they refuse to reveal, even to save themselves from tortures and from death? Abominable practices, which shun the light of day, and which they are attested by mighty oaths never to disclose? Speak thou the truth!" he said, sternly and vehemently.

"Nay, verily," said Phœbe; "but whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are honorable, and whatsoever things are of good report, we seek for those things earnestly."

"What is the real object of these societies?"

"To preserve and disseminate the knowledge of one true God, and of His Son, our Saviour; to encourage each other in holy living, and to avoid all sin."

"What form of oath or obligation is the bond of union among them?"

“There is no oath taken, no obligation executed. One who is admitted into a church giveth all that he hath for the common good, promises to lead a pure and blameless life, and to love the brethren — that is, all who are Christians.”

“What dost thou suppose to be the chief or vital point in the whole system?”

“Only faith in Christ as a Divine Saviour, and the Agapè; that love for all men, and especially for the brethren, for which, I have been told, you Romans have no word in your language.”

“What is Agapè?”

“I hardly know how to tell thee that. The nearest word is charity, and that giveth but a portion of the meaning; for when Paul, who also was a prisoner here at Rome for Christ’s sake, seeketh to define this charity he saith: ‘Though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself; is not puffed up; doth not behave itself unseemly; seeketh not her own; is not easily provoked; thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; believeth all things; hopeth all things; endureth all things; charity never faileth. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these

is charity.' Ah! Roman, if all men had this divine charity in the soul of them, no man, woman, nor child need ever fear to be wronged or injured by any one; and this grace, the issue of which is a life, pure, harmless, useful and beautiful here and eternal life in the world to come, is that for which all Christians seek."

"Thou lookest as if thou didst believe in the verity of that which thou hast spoken!" said the centurion.

"Yea," answered Phœbe; "with all my soul and strength do I believe, and would to God that thou, and all men with thee, did so believe."

Then there fell a long silence between them. The girl quietly watched him, hoping and praying that some holy influence might soften his heart toward herself, and save her from all harm, but the young man sat with bowed head, and strong, inscrutable countenance; submerged in troubled, doubtful, bitter thoughts, until he seemed almost to have forgotten the presence of his prisoner and all their gloomy surroundings. Finally he roused himself by a visible effort, and fixing his eyes once more upon the young girl's face, he said, in sudden, imperative tones: "Knowest thou the Jew, Epaphras?"

Instantly the girl's face, that had begun to glow with enthusiasm while she recited the glorious hymn of Paul in praise of charity, and that had

remained bright and hopeful ever since, was clouded with a shadow of trouble, but almost as quickly it resumed its usual expression of self-possession, and after a momentary hesitation she replied: "I do know an Epaphras, who is an Israelite by birth, but whether he be the same of whom thou speakest I know not."

"Yea," said Marcellus, with hard, bitter sarcasm; "an Israelite by birth; a Christian by religion; a learned man, too; perhaps, a teacher or a bishop of the sect — dost thou not know him?"

"First inform me why thou askest concerning him?"

"I perceive that thou dost know the man," said Marcellus. "I do not; but know that he is an educated man, and, notwithstanding that, a Christian. I seek not to injure him, but only to be certain whether thou knowest the man."

"Yea," said Phœbe; "I do know him, Roman; a great, good and useful man, and a Christian. What wouldst thou have of him?"

"Nothing," replied Marcellus. "But dost thou know that Dorcas, the daughter of Faustina, of whom this same Epaphras hath been guardian, teacher and friend?"

"I have never seen the maiden," answered Phœbe, "but have often heard of her; for she is an orphan, both of whose parents suffered martyr-

dom for Jesus, and all the churches love and honor her."

The angry light once more blazed in the young man's feverish eyes, and he demanded harshly: "How is it that thou knowest Epaphras and not Dorcas? The guardian and not the ward?"

"Simply from the fact that Epaphras hath sometimes held services for our community, but I was never at his chapel, nor hath Dorcas, so far as I am informed, ever attended ours; therefore, I have never met with her."

"That, indeed, seemeth plausible enough," Marcellus said; "but thou couldst find her for me, couldst thou not?"

"Yea, verily," said Phœbe. "I could communicate with Epaphras through our own pastor, and so easily find the maiden Dorcas."

"Then, if thou wilt swear in good faith that thou wilt find and bring her unto me, thou shalt go hence unharmed, and I will henceforth stand for a friend whose protection thou and thy father may safely claim. I will gratify any reasonable wish of thine if thou shalt deliver unto me the maiden Dorcas."

"Why dost thou so earnestly seek after Dorcas?"

"That is mine own affair," he answered, angrily, "and cannot in anywise concern thee. Thou shalt be safe, I tell thee, and thou and thy

father shall enjoy my protection, if thou wilt discover the girl and give her up to me. If not, remember to what thou art condemned; and the hours are passing rapidly."

The girl blanched with fear and sorrow, but she answered boldly: "Roman, thou canst not name a reward for which I would betray my sister Dorcas unto thee!"

"Thy sister!" said Marcellus, furiously. "Even now thou hast declared to me that thou didst not even know the girl."

"Yea," answered Phœbe, quietly; "nor do I know her, even by the sight; but she, also, is a Christian, and all Christian girls are sisters to each other. That is the Agapè. I would not betray her to secure my life, nor for any price that thou couldst offer, if thou didst own the empire."

"I do not ask thee to betray the girl. I would not injure her; but I want her! Canst thou not see that I am miserable because she hath forsaken me? Canst thou not see that I suffer because I see her face and hear her voice no more? Dioscuri!" he shouted, fiercely; "but thou shalt seek and find her for me! Dost thou hear? I say thou shalt!"

"Never!" she answered, quietly, "unless thou first inform me why thou dost so passionately desire to find her, and I then, knowing all, shall be-

lieve that it is right to aid thee; for if it seemeth wrong to me, I will not aid thee, Roman."

The young man gazed upon her fiercely and fixedly, and saw that it would be useless to attempt to compel that seemingly calm and immovable being to aid him, or even to promise to do so. "Thou art like unto all that cherish the accursed superstition!" he cried, with fearful bitterness of spirit. "Calm, immovable, implacable, indifferent to the joys and sorrows of all men! Enemies of the human race! Scorning reward or punishment alike! Alive only to the terrible bondage which this fatal superstition fastens upon the heart and brain. Thou darest even to scorn my very sorrow, and it would be a crime to pity one so pitiless as thou!"

He sprang up and roughly seized the girl by the arm; but, although terrified and almost despairing, she said, with seeming calmness: "If thou dost suffer from any cause, believe me that I would rejoice to find it possible for me to aid thee. Wilt thou not tell me all, so that I may understand what may be the right, and do for thee all that duty may permit?"

The girl's strange calmness, in such striking contrast to his own tempestuous passion, seemed greatly to soothe his violence, and he released her, saying: "Perhaps thou art right. Sit thou there, and I will tell thee all."

Then hurriedly, and with feverish voice and eyes, he said: "Dorcas was at the villa of my father, the Vice-Prefect Varus, for more than a year. She is the loveliest and the most gifted girl in all the world, and I love her more than I love my life. Suddenly, about a month ago, she disappeared — went away of her own accord — and she must be concealed somewhere among the Christians. I cannot live without her; thou must find her for me;" and then, with almost intolerable supplication in his voice, he added: "Thou wilt find her for me, wilt thou not?"

"Didst thou tell Dorcas of thy love for her?"

"Yea, and that made her fly from me," he answered, sadly.

"And wouldst thou seek to compel her to return to thee, knowing that she loves thee not?"

"Dioscuri!" he half shouted; "but Dorcas loveth only me. She did tell me that with all solemnity, and from her face and manner I do know she spoke the truth. And yet she hath forsaken me, nor have I seen nor heard of her since then."

"Didst thou ask her to become thy wife?"

"Nay, I think not. A wife is but a higher sort of slave. In Rome we do not marry for love, but for interest or convenience. I do not suppose it occurred to me to talk of marriage; but if she would only be my wife, I would be a happy man."

"Perhaps thou hast made a large mistake, centurion. We Christian maidens marry only when we love, and love only when we marry. Our church saith: 'Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers;' but if thou hadst desired Dorcas in marriage, she might not have left thee. Of course, I do not know."

"Only find her for me," said the young man; "only find her!"

"I will do this much for thee," said Phœbe. "If thou wilt suffer me to go hence unharmed, I will obtain speech of Dorcas, as thou knowest I can easily do, through Epaphras and our presbyters, and will on the next Sabbath — that is, the fourth day from now — meet thee wherever thou mayest appoint a place, and will bring unto thee any message or letter which Dorcas may desire to send. If she refuse to write to thee, or to send thee any word, I will nevertheless come unto thee again and inform thee exactly how my undertaking in thy business hath resulted. More than this I cannot promise thee to do."

"Dost thou say this in good faith, without equivocation or lying?"

"Christians never lie," she answered proudly. "Hast thou known of any Christian that did ever lie even to escape the rigor of the Roman laws?"

"Nay," answered Marcellus, "and I will even trust thy word. If thou shalt prove to be

true and faithful, I will, henceforth, protect thee even if thou shouldst accomplish nothing. Only do all that thou canst do to aid me and thou shalt be safe."

Then the girl's dark, luminous eyes grew soft, and she took the centurion's hand in hers, and bending low, did kiss his hand, saying: "Thou art a man just and merciful according to thy light and knowledge. Surely, I think if the maiden Dorcas would be wife to any Roman who is not a Christian she would marry thee."

Then the young man spread his toga on the iron couch, saying to her, kindly: "Thou must be weary, Phœbe. Repose thou here and have no fear. The couch is iron, it is true, but it is smooth and thou wilt find it not uncomfortable. It is necessary that I, too, remain until the sun shall rise, and thou shalt then depart. On the evening of the fourth day hence come thou to the villa of the Vice-Prefect Varus on the Appian Way, according to thy promise, fearing nothing."

The girl stretched herself out upon the prison couch, without any sense of doubt or fear, and soon the sorrows of that long and weary day were lost to her in calm and healthful slumber. But the young man sat motionless, his elbow upon the table, his head upon his hand, and his sore heart overburdened with sleepless thoughts. He thought of Dorcas, and all that he had ever heard,

and all that he had personally observed concerning the mysterious Christian Association to which she belonged, passed with the tide of conflicting emotions through his restless heart. What was he to think of this Christian community? There was a hopeless and irreconcilable antagonism between what he had heard of the Christians and what he had seen for himself. It was necessary to reject one or the other view of the hated sect; the difference between the two accounts of them could never be harmonized; there was no possibility of holding to the possible verity of both views. He knew that for centuries the Imperial Edicts — the very highest and most authoritative form of Roman law — issued for the suppression of Christianity, assumed the facts to be that it was a secret association of the depraved, vile and criminal — inhuman and pestilent, atheistic, licentious and cruel. He knew that even the grave, erudite, and laconic Tacitus, Rome's greatest historian, had described the Christians in terms of calmest unmitigated scorn and loathing, and had not censured the terrible cruelties inflicted upon them, even by Nero, whom he hated. He knew that the popular sentiment of Rome, and, in fact, of the Empire, held the Christians in utter abhorrence, and commonly attributed to them as rites and ceremonies of their religion — crimes so utterly abominable, that pagan religion refused the promise of pardon to the per-

petrators of such loathsome atrocities upon any terms whatever, and pagan philosophy did not pretend to know or seek for any expiation for such guilt. But, personally, he knew that many of those who had been subjected to torture because of this religion, were firm, unyielding, meek, quiet, patient and forgiving; praying even for their judges and executioners. He knew that only in rare instances had any crime been charged against them, except the crime of being Christians, and in no instance had such crime been proved. The only pure, chaste, educated girls he had ever met with were both Christians, neither of them ascetics — both full of human kindness and sympathy — but both as fixed and changeless as the everlasting hills in their devotion to this terrible superstition, and in their adherence to that manner of life which seemed in some way to be the natural and logical outcome of their faith. One view must be true to the exclusion of the others; there was no neutral ground between them upon which they could both stand together. If judged by what Roman law, and history, and opinions declared to be the truth concerning them, no association on earth had ever been so hopelessly, desperately and determinedly wicked. Judged only by what he personally knew, no society was ever so pure, exalted, self-sacrificing and perfect. He could not decide for himself how the truth was; and hour after hour

he pondered the subject without reaching any satisfactory conclusion, fearing that even the outward appearance of temperance, veracity, meekness and constancy which had so powerfully impressed him upon many occasions, might be — as it was commonly said to be — only a mask behind which Christianity concealed from the outraged and insulted world an atheistic, beastly and abominable wickedness. And so, while the young girl slept calmly and peacefully, the Roman's heart was like the troubled sea that cannot rest; and so the night passed slowly away, until the slant rays of the rising sun struck on the narrow dungeon window. Then Phœbe awoke, and her friendly salutation being returned by the centurion, he rapped upon the door with his sword-hilt, and the sentry came and opened it.

“Say thou nothing to any one,” Marcellus told her, “but quietly follow me.”

And quickly they passed through to the outer door of the prison, and there met with Lucanius, and father and daughter joyfully embraced each other, and so they departed from that cruel place. And the centurion passed them by, saying to the girl, in low, emphatic tones: “Keep thou thy promises faithfully.”

To whom she answered, without pausing on her way: “Yea, Roman! Doubt not thou at all!”

And as they went slowly on their way to their

pleasant home beyond the Tiber, the young girl noticed that her father's hand was wrapped up in linen cloths; and she said unto him: "Father, what hath hurt thy hand?" and her heart grew sick within her as she waited for his answer: "The Lord hath tried me, daughter, but not beyond what I was able, for His sake, to bear. In fact, when they had crushed my fingers in the cruel engines, it seemed to me that all at once I did receive great strength from Him that helpeth; and I do believe that no tortures could ever have been sufficient to force me to deny the faith. Not only is one strengthened of the Lord, but I think also that suffering, to some extent, defeats the purposes for which it is inflicted, and that there is a point beyond which it ceases to be torture."

"I glory at thy constancy!" she answered. "The Master hath dealt most kindly with me. The young Roman whom thou didst hear warning me to keep a promise which I made to him, seeketh to find Dorcas, the Daughter of Faustina, and I did promise to bring news of her to him. He loved her with a strong, controlling passion; and, I think, will see that no injury shall henceforth befall us by the Roman law; and he hath been good to me and kind."

CHAPTER X

“ HE THAT SEEKETH FINDETH ”

ALTHOUGH Marcellus derived some hope and consolation from the apparent sincerity with which Phœbe had promised to aid him in learning the whereabouts of Dorcas, and in communicating with her, he did not relax his efforts to discover some possible path by which she had been accustomed to pass from the Appian Way, in the vicinity of the ruined villa, unto that unknown place to which he was satisfied she had gone on every Seventh day during the period in which she had been resident at the villa of Varus. So deeprooted and inveterate was the distrust and hatred with which the Romans of his rank regarded Christianity, and all those who professed it, that while he had resolved to trust the promise of Phœbe, he found it really impossible to give more than a painful and unsatisfactory half-confidence to her, and in this uncertain state of mind, being compelled to wait at least until the afternoon of the next Seventh day before he would certainly know whether she intended to deal sincerely with him, he could not rest supinely in the interval, but

found it necessary to keep up his almost daily visits to the ruined villa, and his unavailing search for the path Dorcas had been accustomed to follow in that vicinity.

Accordingly, on the following Sunday morning, long before the sun had risen, Marcellus hastened along the Appian Way toward the desolated villa — a vicinity that for more than a month he had haunted like some restless ghost. While he was wandering in that dreary waste, rendered almost oblivious to his surroundings by the one consuming sorrow and yearning of his heart, his attention was caught by the form of an old woman, tramping slowly and painfully through the tangled thicket, in which there was no visible path. He vacantly wondered what she could be doing there at such an early hour, and noticed that she did not seem to wander aimlessly about in the vagabond fashion that had become so familiar to his own experience, but pursued her slow and difficult way, as if she knew where she was going, and as if she had some definite end in view. The young man kept his eyes upon her, followed her cautiously, and gradually drew nearer to her until she was seventy-five yards distant from him, when suddenly she disappeared, he could not imagine how or whither. “ Gone like a witch ! ” he said to himself ; but he could clearly distinguish the very spot on which she was standing when she had vanished ;

and, keeping his eye fixed upon that spot, and moved by an almost powerless hope, he cautiously, but swiftly stepped forward, and found only what seemed to be a sheet of plaster on the hillside, that looked as if it might once have formed part of a cistern or cellar long since destroyed. That was all. But when he came immediately to this fragment of a ruined wall he perceived that the next step to the left would lead, not as he supposed, into the thicket that spread around on every side, but through a narrow opening, half-hidden by brambles and underbrush, into the side of the hill. It was dark as midnight, and he knew neither the depth nor direction of the cavern, but with that fine capacity for instantaneous decision and action, which is one of the surest results of thorough military training, he stepped lightly and quickly into that subterranean darkness. But, in a moment, he stood still with surprise. A narrow line of artificial light caught his eye, and, gazing intently, he saw that, a few feet away from him, the old woman whom he had seen outside, held in her hand a diminutive lamp, and that by its feeble flame she was endeavoring to light the wick of another lamp of ordinary size. And as soon as her trembling hands enabled her to do so, she hid away the smaller lamp, and bearing the other in her hand proceeded on her way. The light gave sufficient illumination to reveal to Marcellus the fact

that she was going through a long gallery cut out of the rock, of the length of which he could not conjecture; but instantly he determined to follow the woman cautiously wherever she might go, and see what would come of it.

The old woman pursued her way along the smooth floor of the gallery with greater alacrity, and the young centurion followed her cautiously through every bend and winding of the path. He soon became satisfied that she was too deaf to hear his footsteps, and that the only danger he incurred of being discovered by her lay in the probability that she might suddenly turn around and see him; and there seemed no probability of this occurrence, because, having the light in her hand, she would be looking away from it and into the darkness. He therefore followed close upon her heels, determined not to lose sight of her again. She went on a great distance, and suddenly she paused a moment where another gallery opened into that in which she walked. Then came a voice that cried in loud, distinct tones: "Walk thou by faith?" and the woman answered with the words: "In His name," and entered into the new gallery. No one was anywhere visible, nor could Marcellus determine whence came this singular challenge; for he understood at once that it was a challenge as much as the password of a Roman encampment. But as he bore

no lamp, and followed the old woman so closely, he rightly supposed that the invisible sentry would take it for granted that she was his guide through the labyrinth, and so kept on his way without pausing, and was not challenged. Whenever she came to a new gallery into which she desired to go, the woman paused, and the same challenge was given: "Walk thou by faith?" and the same answer given, "In His name;" and at last she entered the same chapel in the rock into which we have already followed Dorcas.

The room was filled with men, women and children, and was fairly lighted by a multitude of lamps set in niches cut into the wall on every side. Marcellus paused before he had reached the entrance, and squeezed himself close against the more shaded side of the gallery, and contemplated the strange and quiet scene before him.

On the larger table lay a thing, covered over with a long cloak, the outlines of which resembled those of the human form. On the smaller table was a snowy linen cloth that concealed something, the shape of which the young centurion could not divine; but his glance fell upon it almost suspiciously, because he understood at once that he had come upon one of those secret chapels in which the hated Christians were wont to meet in order to celebrate the fearful rites of their abominable

and inhuman superstition. He knew well that it had long been reported, and generally believed, at Rome, “that the Christians, as the most wicked of human kind, practiced, in their dark recesses, every abomination that a depraved fancy could suggest, and solicited the favor of their unknown God by the sacrifice of every moral virtue.” He knew “that many who pretended to confess, or to relate the ceremonies of this abhorred society, had asserted that human sacrifices were among the least of the horrible barbarities practiced among the mystic symbols of initiation; that proselytes were unknowingly led to inflict many a secret and mortal wound on the innocent victim of their errors; that as soon as the cruel deeds were perpetrated, the sectaries drank the blood, and pledged themselves to eternal secrecy by a mutual consciousness of guilt.” It was as confidently affirmed that this inhuman sacrifice was succeeded by a suitable entertainment, marked by orgies to which those of profligate Rome were innocent in comparison.

He had never really believed all of the atrocious calumnies commonly circulated concerning the Christians, and since he had known that a being so chaste and refined as Dorcas belonged to the sect, he had come to believe that nearly all of these malicious reports were false; yet he felt a

thrill of horrible curiosity in looking upon that snowy cloth, so carefully disposed, which concealed from view he knew not what.

The young man gazed eagerly over the assembly — perhaps four hundred in number — seeking to discover whether Dorcas was present, but as the gallery in which he stood was on the west side of the chapel, while all the congregation faced the east, he could not tell whether she was among those over whom his range of vision extended or not. He determined, at any hazard, to remain quiet, and await such developments as might occur, knowing, at any rate, that he would have the opportunity to see and hear for himself just what the Christians do and say in one of those secret assemblies which inspired the ordinary Roman with loathing and with horror; and what he saw and heard was as follows: A man of about forty-eight, possibly fifty, years of age, tall, erect, swarthy, handsome, of a grave and dignified demeanor, stepped upon the low platform at the east side of the chapel, and, facing the audience, raised his right hand up, and immediately every one of the assembly quietly rose, and, with uplifted hand, in solemn tones followed the presbyter, saying: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, and in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord; who was conceived of the Holy Ghost; born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate; crucified,

dead, and buried! On the third day He rose from the dead, ascended into heaven; and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; whence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; in the common Church; in the communion of Believers; the forgiveness of Sins; the resurrection of the Dead; and the life everlasting. Amen!”

Marcellus heard this profession of faith with profound interest and astonishment. Because the Christians refused to worship any of the gods of Rome, the general belief among the pagans was that they were atheists, who had no God at all; but having listened to their own solemn declaration that they believed in God the Father, and in Christ His Son, it occurred to him that if the Holy Ghost were a Divine Being also, they could not be atheists, but had faith in these three Gods at least; and he gazed carefully around to see whether the chapel contained any idol, eikon, or image, to represent these Deities; but there was none whatever.

Then the whole audience united in singing to a sweet and solemn melody the following words:

“ Lord, as the lamp-light guides our feet
Thro’ all this dark but dear retreat,
So let Thy true light mark the road
That leads our willing hearts to God,
And blessedness, and peace!

“As here, so far beneath the ground,
 But for our lamps a gloom profound,
 Would darken all with fear and doubt;
 So would our hearts be dark without
 The light of love and faith.

“But for our lamps fierce beasts would come
 And make this safe retreat their home;
 So would fierce lusts and passions rise
 To vex our spirits with their lies —
 But for the light of faith and love.

“Lord, as Thy people here abide
 Hidden from earthly hate and pride;
 So may Thy Spirit teach each heart
 To live a holy life apart,
 Hidden with Christ in God!”

Marcellus heard the sweet voice of Dorcas, dwelling lovingly upon the words of that chaste and simple song, and began to think that it was only the ignorance of vindictive hatred that could associate the idea of crime or impurity with a worship so free from any exhibition of passion or pride. But there were yet greater surprises awaiting him.

The presbyter kneeled down, saying: “Let us pray,” the whole assembly repeating the prayer with him:

“Our Father, which art in Heaven; hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be

done on earth as in Heaven; give us daily bread sufficient for our daily use; and forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors; and may we not be led into trial; but deliver us from trouble; for Thine is the kingdom and the power, and the doctrine, forever. Amen.”

And then the presbyter alone said: “ Almighty God, who hast given us grace at this time, with one accord, to make our common supplications unto Thee; and dost promise that when two or three are gathered together in Thy name, Thou wilt grant their requests; fulfill now, O Lord, the desire and petitions of Thy servants, as may be most expedient for them; granting us in this world knowledge of Thy truth, and in the world to come, life everlasting.”

And the people said: “ Amen! ”

Then the presbyter alone continued in prayer, saying: “ Most gracious God, in whose hands are the destinies of all nations, and of every man, we humbly beseech Thee to bless Thy servant, Maxentius, the Emperor of Rome, and all others in authority; open his eyes to Thy truth, that he may escape Thy righteous judgment by due repentance; that he may cease to vex Thy people; and so order his government that peace and happiness, truth and justice, religion and piety, may be established among us for all generations; and that we, Thy servants, being hurt by no persecutions,

may evermore give thanks unto Thee in Thy holy Church, through Jesus Christ, our Lord."

And all the people answered "Amen."

And the presbyter, stretching forth his hands over the people, said: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with us all evermore. Amen!"

Then said the centurion to himself: "They even invoke the blessing of their God upon the Emperor Maxentius, who persecuted them to the death."

Then the presbyter said: "Ye that do truly and earnestly repent of all sins, and are in love and charity with all your neighbors, and are leading holy lives, following the commandments of God, and walking in His holy ways, draw near with faith, and take this Holy Sacrament to your comfort, giving most humble and hearty thanks to God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for the redemption of the world by the death and passion of our Saviour Christ, who did humble Himself even to the death upon the cross, that He might make us the children of God, and exalt us unto everlasting life, enabling us, even in this present world, to put our whole trust and confidence in His divine mercy, and to serve Him in holiness and pureness of living, the fruits of which are love,

joy, and peace, and the end of which is life eternal.”

Then, as many as could do so kneeled round the table, and the presbyter, removing that linen cloth which had excited the curiosity of Marcellus, uncovered a flagon of wine, a small cup, and a plate full of unleavened bread. Thereof he gave each one to eat, saying: “The body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which He gave for you, preserve your soul and body unto everlasting life.”

Likewise, taking the cup of wine, he gave unto each of them, saying: “The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ which He shed for you, preserve your souls and bodies unto everlasting life.”

And, when they had partaken, he said: “Arise ye, and go in peace, and the peace of God be with you.”

Then the whole assembly rose and united in chanting the following words: “Glory be to God on high, and peace on earth amongst good men. We praise Thee! we bless Thee! we worship Thee! we give thanks unto Thee, O Lord God and everlasting King!”

Then the presbyter stepped to the longer table and removed the cloak, uncovering the corpse of a man. Then the presbyter, resuming his place upon the platform, spake as follows: “Beloved, ye know that our Lord Jesus Christ unstopped the

ears of the deaf, restored sight to the blind, raised the dead, and did many other wonderful works, in order than men might believe. Ye know that Christ committed thaumaturgical power to His Apostles, and, through them, unto the common church, which power hath been continuously exercised unto this day, whereof all ye are witnesses. Ye know, also, that by far the greater part of those Christians who, from the beginning, have suffered martyrdom, did rejoice to be counted worthy so to suffer for the faith of Christ, and refused to accept deliverance, and did not desire the Anastasis. But this man, whom ye all know, having been condemned on yesterday to die because he followed Jesus, did earnestly desire the Anastasis for the sake of his motherless children and for the sake of the work which he might yet accomplish for the Lord, and sent, by certain of the brethren, to beseech the church that ye would pray God to raise him from the dead. Therefore, I desire ye all once more to unite in prayer, in faith doubting nothing, that, if it be the will of God, our brother Charis may abide with us yet longer for the accomplishment of the holy purposes which he had in his heart when the pagans slew him."

And the presbyter kneeled down, and all the people with him, and the presbyter said: "Almighty God, Father of all mercies, that by Thy Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, didst create all

worlds, and all their natural laws, by which the order and harmony of the universe subsisteth, to whom all things are possible, we, Thy faithful servants, beseech Thee, if it be in accordance with Thy holy will, to recall this our brother back to earthly life, for Thine own glory, and for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

And all the people said “ Amen! ” and the presbyter came up to the longer table, and to the corpse thereon, and took it by the hands, saying: “ Brother, if it be the will of God concerning thee, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, arise and live.”

And the man got up, first into a sitting posture upon the table, and thence upon his feet on the floor, saying: “ Praise the Lord, O my soul, that hath granted our desire, and hath renewed my life.”

And the people praised God with him. And then he inquired for his children, and, having found them, he greeted them affectionately and went on rejoicing.

The Roman rubbed his eyes, to assure himself that he was not in a dream, but the Christians took the fact as if it were to them a pleasant but not uncommon event.

CHAPTER XI

IN WHICH PHCÆBE REDEEMETH HER PROMISE

WHEN Lucanius and Phœbe reached their home beyond the Tiber, after the young girl had been released from the prison, many of the Christians who had heard the fact that they had been seized and carried into the city assembled to give expression to sympathy for their sufferings, rejoicings for their happy escape, and reverence for Lucanius, who was thenceforth numbered among the "Confessors," as they were called, who, because of their devotion to Christianity, had endured torture, but had escaped martyrdom. Among these friends was Doscus, presbyter of the community of which both father and daughter were members, who warmly commended the quiet faithfulness evinced by Lucanius in the trial which he had undergone.

Phœbe said unto Doscus: "Knowest thou where the Presbyter Epaphras may be found? or knowest thou the way unto his chapel?"

And Doscus answered: "Yea; his chapel is in the catacombs, upon the other side of Rome, a long distance out on the Appian Way."

"I desire much to obtain speech of Dorcas, the

daughter of Faustina, who is ward to Epaphras, if thou canst direct me to his chapel."

"If thou wilt go beyond the Tomb of the Scipios, along the Appian Way, not far beyond, thou wilt find a vineyard and a cottage built of sun-dried bricks, upon the left hand of the highway. There dwelleth an ancient man whose name is Gregorius, and if thou wilt tell him that thou art a Christian, he will guide thee unto the chapel of Epaphras."

On the afternoon of Saturday, Phœbe, accompanied by her father, crossed the Tiber at the Bridge of Fabricus, and passing by the Temples of Fortune and Vesta, the Circus Maximus and the Tarpeian Rock, entered upon the Appian Way, which they followed through the valley that winds along the base of Mount Aventine and Celinus, to a point some distance beyond that indicated by Doscius, and soon found the cottage he had described, and the aged Gregorius, to whom, by certain signs usual among them, they made themselves known as Christians; and Gregorius cheerfully undertook to guide them to the chapel of Epaphras. Lucanius thereupon returned to his own home, and Phœbe followed the ancient a long distance, and, finally, by one of the many secret entrances to the catacombs, descended into the mysterious recesses, where Gregorius soon found and lighted two small lamps, one of which he gave to Phœbe;

and they thereupon took their way through the long subterranean galleries. After several turns and windings had been passed, they heard the voice of an unseen sentinel crying out: "Walk ye by faith?" to which Gregorius at once replied: "In His name!" Then pausing, the old man said: "This maiden is a Christian who seeketh Dorcas, the daughter of Faustina. Knowest thou where she may be found?"

"I know not," said the sentinel, "but the women who have charge of our chapel can tell you."

"How shall the maiden reach their abode?" said Gregorius.

"Let her follow this gallery, and take every one that openeth into it from the left. At the fourth opening she will find guides."

"Art thou afraid to go alone?" asked Gregorius.

"Nay;" replied Phœbe, "for there can be none but Christians in the catacombs."

"Then fare thee well, daughter," said the ancient.

"Many thanks for thy kindness," said Phœbe, "and farewell."

And then, bearing her little lamp carefully, the young girl proceeded upon her solitary way. It was a strange sort of confidence, indeed. Far underground, in more than midnight darkness, fenced in upon either side by long lines of the nameless

and countless dead who slept in that vast necropolis — alone, bearing a flickering lamp that lighted the gloomy path only a few feet in advance, the young girl quietly went on without the sense of fear, because she knew that there were none but Christians in that dreary labyrinth — a glorious commentary upon the character of the faith which she professed.

Phœbe went forward, taking every left hand opening in the way, until she had entered three of them, and as she drew nigh the fourth, a broad glare of light shone across her path, and looking before her she saw that in one direction the gallery seemed to expand to greater width, and along one side thereof there ran a clear, small stream of water, as if some affluent spring discharged itself upon the rocky way; and not far ahead of her a fire burned brightly, over which a huge copper kettle was boiling, and several women were busy thereat, some of them washing clothes, and some of them cooking in various vessels at the fire. A young and beautiful girl was ironing out the last of a little heap of linen napkins, and upon the table at which she worked was a plate bearing a cross made of thin layers of unleavened bread. The stronger light all about them prevented them from observing Phœbe and her little lamp until she had come quite close unto them. The young girl was the first to note her coming, and looking

up she said quietly: "Walk thou by faith?"

"In His name," answered Phœbe, promptly. Then all of the women saluted her, and the young girl said: "Thou art welcome, sister."

Then Phœbe answered: "I am Phœbe, the daughter of Lucanius, a deacon of the community of Doscus, beyond the Tiber. I seek Dorcas, the daughter of Faustina. Canst thou tell me where she may be found?"

"I am that Dorcas," said the maiden. "I have just finished the preparations for the service of to-morrow; come thou with me."

Then she laid the folded napkins upon her arm, and taking the plate of bread in her hand, she passed along through the gallery, and Phœbe, bearing her lamp, walked at her side. At a short distance they came unto an opening of another gallery, over the entrance to which hung a curtain of heavy cloth, and passing this they entered a large hall, lighted by a huge lamp suspended from the rocky roof, and on either side of this hall were smaller chambers cut out of the rock, over the entrance of each of which were similar curtains hanging. "Here we abide," said Dorcas. "Mine apartment is at the end of this hall; let us go thither."

And when they had gone thither, Dorcas carefully laid away the napkins and the bread in a wooden safe divided off by shelving, and placing a

chair for Phœbe, invited her to be seated, saying: "Our evening's meal will soon be ready. Thou canst rest thyself now, and ere long sup with us."

And Phœbe said: "I pray thee, sister, stand thou there where the house-light will fall upon thee. I desire to see thee clearly."

And gazing upon the maiden with a singular expression of countenance, she continued: "Sister, thou art wondrous fair; it is not strange he loveth thee so much."

"Of whom speakest thou?"

"Surely thou canst guess."

"But I will not do so, sister. Of whom dost thou speak?"

"Of the young centurion, Marcellus."

A pang of intense feeling nipped at the young girl's heart, but the lifelong habit of self-control hardly permitted a trace of it to appear in her face or voice, as she quietly answered: "Knowest thou the Roman, sister? Dost thou come from him?"

"Yea, verily; and I come hither only to tell thee truly all that I know of him, and the reason of my seeking thee."

Then Dorcas seated herself beside Phœbe, and, taking her hand, said:

"Sister, I am ready to listen to thee. But is the young man well? Doth he seem to be happy? When didst thou see him last?"

“Three days ago,” answered Phœbe. “He is not ill, but is apparently in sore trouble because of thy disappearance from his father’s house. But I must tell thee all that hath happened.” And then, beginning with the arrest of her father and herself, she rapidly, but clearly, narrated every incident thereof, and of her brief acquaintance with Marcellus. Her truth, directness, and sensibility would be, perhaps, impossible to a chaste maiden of a later age in the world’s history, for good-breeding — good form, as fashionable cant calleth it — hath been largely substituted for genuine modesty, and our linen-cambric phylacteries of “refinement” have taken the place of that plain, unpretentious holiness of heart and of life which neither knew nor cherished any unchaste purpose or desire.

Before Phœbe’s narration was ended, the two girls were friends, and more than once during her recital they sat sobbing in each other’s arms, and, having given every incident, Phœbe continued: “And so, sister, if thou desirest to see the centurion again, I am to arrange a time and place for the interview. If thou desirest to write anything unto him, I will bear thy letter. If thou wouldst send any message unto him, I will deliver it for thee. If thou dost refuse to hold any communication with him, I will so inform him. What wilt thou do, Dorcas?”

Dorcas did not immediately reply, but seemed to be buried in very serious thought. At last she said: "I will even consider the matter carefully, for I know not what I ought to do. First thou must sup with us, and afterward we can converse yet more. Come thou with me, sister."

And passing out into an adjoining hall they found the other women already assembled, and having been affectionately welcomed by them — all of them — they sat down to their simple but healthful repast; one of the oldest of the women having first given thanks to God for the peace and comfort in which His providence permitted them to live.

And afterward the two girls went together a short distance through the catacombs into the chapel of Epaphras, and sat there together discussing their affairs; and a strong friendship grew between them. For, both of them being Christians, there was no possibility of the intervention of those "roots of bitterness" that spring up to trouble even the purest hearts, under systems which create false social and class distinctions, based upon those ideas of superiority that grow out of idolatries of birth, rank, interest, property, and other extraneous circumstances, that have as little to do with the character of an individual as the metal of which a dog's collar is made has to do with the nature of the brute; and, because they both were

Christians, each of them attributed to the other the same simplicity, unselfishness and truth, the same purity of life and of heart, the same desire to understand and to do that which is right, which she knew to be the guiding purpose of her own heart and conduct. Hence, the confidence which they mutually reposed in each other was of a stronger, truer, purer growth than more recent civilization can produce or comprehend; because the difference between the girls of that period consisted in the fact that some of them were Christians and some were not. Those who were so, met upon terms of equality; those who were not, were separated from each other by the infinite cobwebisms of false distinctions which prevailed throughout all heathenism, and were, for the most part, natural enemies, each envying, suspecting, and hating the other; each striving to defeat and mortify the other; each seeking some advantage and precedence of the other — all of them born to an inheritance of social lies and shams, and false pretenses, about which they quarreled and schemed, only in a smaller more miserable way, than did the men under the influence of the same wild-beast civilization. But these two girls being both Christians, and finding between themselves a similarity in age and sentiments as to all that nature creates, or grace contributes, to the adornment of character, loved and trusted each other from the first;

although the hands and face of Phœbe showed plainly the traces of her farm-life labor, while those of Dorcas, who had been reared in the darkness of the catacombs, with lighter tasks to do, were delicate as finest waxwork.

"It is best, I think," said Dorcas, continuing their pleasant, confidential talk, "that I do not see him again, nor write to him, nor send him any message, except a single line in order to verify the statement that thou hast seen me as thou didst promise him."

"I am not wise enough to advise thee," answered Phœbe. "But wouldst thou, in any case, be the wife of a Roman?"

"I know not. But I would not marry any man that is not a Christian, no matter what might be his nativity or rank, nor how highly I might esteem him."

"But dost thou remember that Paul saith the unbelieving husband may be sanctified by a Christian wife?"

"Yea," said Dorcas; "but it seemeth to me that in that place he speaketh of two who are already husband and wife, of whom one shall become a Christian, and not of those who are unmarried."

"But dost thou not believe that his great love for thee would lead him to adopt thy faith?"

"That might even be," she said. "But I have

been taught that it would be wrong to marry one who is not a Christian; and that one may not do evil that good may come of it."

"But thou lovest the Roman — canst thou be happy if thou shalt see his face no more?"

"Perhaps not happy," answered Dorcas, sadly; "but to be free is better than to be happy, and I shall be free; but they who sacrifice the truth are never free; they are the slaves of that for which they have given up the truth."

"Thou speakest of the liberty of the gospel?"

"Surely," replied Dorcas, "for the slavery of the body is an evil of smaller consequence. The only real bondage is the slavery of the soul."

"He saith he cannot live without thee," said Phœbe, "and his appearance indicates that he speaketh truly. Thou knowest that the common refuge of the heathen from any sorrow which maketh them weary of the world is suicide."

The young girl shuddered as her companion spoke these words, knowing the fearful readiness with which the pagans sought for that refuge from any disappointment, but she murmured: "It is easy for any one to find excuses or justification for that course which agreeth well with his own wishes; but thou knowest that the question for us is never what might please us best, but is the straight and narrow way of present right and duty.

I think that any one who earnestly desireth to do so, may find the way."

"Shall I tell Marcellus that if he were a Christian thou wouldst be his wife?"

"Nay," answered Dorcas. "To be a Christian would be for him to suffer worldly sacrifices that none but Jesus hath the right to demand of any human being — sacrifices which I would not dare to accept if he should offer to make them. Even to profess the faith and adopt the forms thereof would involve the loss of his social position and political importance, his property and influence — and, perhaps, his life also — a sacrifice too great to be made for anything less than the love of Christ and the sure promise of eternal life, which alone outweigh all earthly consideration. It is better that we never meet again."

"But he would leave thee unobstructed in the exercise of thy religion, and his influence might serve to protect many Christians besides."

"But if he remain a heathen, scarce a day could pass us by in which I must not yield to the idolatries in which he hath been reared, or else find myself separated in heart from him in all the ceremonies of religion and in all the incidents of home. Such a union is no Christian marriage. It is but the legal copartnership of paganism. The difficulties in the way of marriage between a Christian

and an idolater seem to me to be irreconcilable and insuperable."

"And canst thou not find any neutral ground between them, on which both might stand secure?"

"Surely there can be none. Honor, wealth, rank, power, war, slavery, marriages of convenience or of interest — all the aims and purposes of life which he hath been trained up to regard as best and highest — seem criminal and sinful things to me. Useful labor, or employments which he esteems to be fit only for slaves, I know to be a holy duty from which there is no escaping without sin.

"The faith on which I rest my soul is unto him an impracticable and insane delusion. Thou knowest that in Rome not only all that labor with their hands, but all that follow any useful pursuit — their barbers, tailors, bakers, mechanics, teachers; all, except soldiers, priests and lawyers — are slaves or worse than slaves. A million of people, who are even less esteemed than the other million, who live upon the public granaries and do nothing — voluntary paupers who care for nothing except daily bread and the games of the circus — *panem et circenses*, as their own poet saith. Only those employments which are useless or pernicious to mankind are deemed to be respectable, and all other work is left to slaves or foreigners. We, sister, have been taught to despise all men

that do not add something useful to the common stock. The differences between Christianity and heathenism go down to the very roots of life, and there can be neither happiness nor peace in any attempt at uniting them together. I must, therefore, write unto Marcellus that thou hast come to me according to thy promise, and that I can give no answer except that which I have already given; this shalt thou take to him and nothing more."

"Art thou certain," said Phœbe, "that thou dost really love this man?"

"Yea," answered Dorcas, "and with all my heart. But I love not his idolatry, nor his mode of life. Nor do I think that any heathen could understand the only love which we could value, or could dare to trust. For their love, even, it seemeth to me, is like their religion; like their political and military glory; like their magnificent highways and aqueducts; like their splendid cities and costly tombs—a physical thing only. They know the worth of a sane mind in a sound body—the intellectual and sensuous sides of existence—but they have no spiritual life, or, if any, it is mute and ignorant, incapable of discerning and loving other spirits, incapable of expressing itself. In some respects, even this most excellent Marcellus exciteth my pity. He seemeth to be, in some things, lower than an infant—almost on a level

with the brutes — as I think all men would be but for the faith of Christ.”

“How, then, is it that thou lovest him?”

“That, indeed, I cannot tell thee,” said Dorcas, “nor can I understand it. He is a very handsome youth; but there must be some handsomer. He is bright and strong; but there must be some more excellent. He is brave, and true, and tender; yet there must be some that are at least his equal in all this. In his spiritual life he is but a child; and yet there must be, even of his age, some full-grown, glorious Christian men. And yet, in my heart, I love him far more than I could love any man on earth. All my heart goes out to him alone, and I could live or die alike to bring him happiness, and for him would think naught too great a sacrifice, except the faith of Jesus. Ah, Phœbe, it is so strange, so sad, so sweet, so pitiful! I know not how it is that of all men on earth, I do love only him.”

“I have met no Roman of high rank but him,” said Phœbe; “those whom I have known among the working people seem to belong unto a different race of men.”

“The higher classes of them,” said Dorcas, “are little better than intellectual brutes, and the lower classes are brutes of lower intelligence. But Christians, even those who cannot read nor write, are gentle, refined, attractive.”

“What causeth this vast difference?”

“I have heard the learned Epaphras declare that this condition of things is the necessary result of all human governments over a people. He saith often that governments which recognize war, slavery, private property rights, rank, title, prerogatives, never did, and never can, do anything better for mankind than to produce a ruling class at the top, to whom all the advantages of civilization accrue, and an oppressed or enslaved people at the bottom, upon which fall all the burdens of the world, and some form of ecclesiasticism between these two extremes, seeking to adjust mutual rights and duties by arms and religion. He saith that the gospel of our Lord alone can ever give liberty to the great multitudes of men, and that even the persecuted Christians are the only people that ever taste the sweetness of real personal freedom; and that the Church will make all people free, by abolishing the laws which enslave and degrade them. He said that our Lord, although he addressed the Scribes and Pharisees only, really meant every ruling class on earth, when he denounced those who bind heavy burdens for other men's shoulders which they themselves would not touch with a little finger; and that the ruling classes, no matter by what name designated, will always so bind the poor, until the masses of mankind shall become Christians, and by the power

of faith abolish war, slavery, and Mammon worship, which are instruments of tyranny."

"I know not how that may be," said Phœbe. "We came hither from the Bridge of Fabricus, and along the Appian Way, through the most densely populated portion of Rome, and there was a mighty contrast, truly, between the palaces of the great and wealthy and the vast multitude that scarcely live by labor, and the yet greater multitude of Romans that are too proud to work and afraid to steal, and content to live in idleness, drawing their support from the public granaries. I know not the causes of it, but it seems to me to be a fearful and a shameful thing."

"This cruel and infamous state of Rome, Epaphras declareth to be the condition of all great cities, and that it is everywhere the net result of the science of government, and that there can never be any permanent escape therefrom, except on the basis of our common church. Thinkest thou, Phœbe, that a woman that is a Christian could conscientiously be the wife of any man whose highest perception of life and duty is to preserve, enforce, and work out unto its legitimate results, such a system as this? Surely it must be true that the less a Roman noble and a Christian girl see of each other the better for the peace of both. But it groweth late. Thou must abide with me until

after services to-morrow, and as much longer as thou canst. Come with me."

And, so they returned unto the great hall, and rejoined the other women, and after simple but earnest religious services, they sought their sleeping-rooms, which opened from the hall on every side. For, although there was no difference between day and night in their subterranean home, they divided the hours between the duties incumbent upon them, just as those did who lived above ground — so many to sleep, so many to toil, so many to religion, so many to reading and conversation — and their hidden life was peaceful and pleasant enough, and on the next day, which was Sunday, they went together to the services at which Marcellus was to be so strangely present.

CHAPTER XII

IN WHICH THE GOSPEL IS STATED AS IT WAS IN
A. D. 312

AFTER Epaphras had blessed them, as related at the close of the Christian services in the subterranean chapel, the congregation began to take up their lamps, and to depart by the various galleries that led into the chapel, and the centurion was resolved not to go thence until he had seen and spoken to Dorcas; but he did not desire to be discovered in the act of listening to the strange and awful scenes which he had just witnessed. There was no time, however, for deliberation, and with that celerity of action and decision which is part of the military education and character, he took the hilt of his sword in both hands, and drawing up his toga, so as to conceal both his face and the weapon, he dropped upon his knees, with his face to the wall, his head bowed upon his hands, so that by glancing sideways he could still see Dorcas sitting in the chapel, and the young girl, Phœbe, sitting beside her; wherefore the centurion knew that she had been faithful to her contract with him. Although his own accidental discovery of

the chapel forestalled the visit which she had promised to make to him upon the evening of that same day, he was not the less pleased by, and grateful for, this proof of her fidelity.

Quietly the congregation dispersed, many of them passing through the gallery in which he kneeled; but to them the sight of a man upon his knees anywhere near those sacred precincts was an every-day occurrence, and no one accosted, or even seemed to notice him. Soon he saw the presbyter go over to where Dorcas sat, and take a seat beside her, and he rightly judged that all the rest had gone, and that the presbyter was that Epaphras of whom he had heard Dorcas speak. The centurion gazed upon the young girl's perfect face with profoundest love and admiration, and it seemed to him that he lived again, after long weeks of care and apathy like death. Then he arose, and advancing quickly to the threshold of the chapel, he saw that both Dorcas and the presbyter observed his approach, and then he darted forward, and, raising the maiden's hand, he bowed, and kissed it passionately, exclaiming: "O, darling, I have found thee at last, thank all the gods at once! Why didst thou so cruelly leave me, Dorcas? Every day have I sought thee sorrowing, and every hour I pined to see thy face, until the great grief of thine absence is wearying out my heart, and wasting all my strength! But I

have found thee at last, and thou shalt pass out of my sight no more unless thou promise I shall see thee again, or unless thou leave this dreary place and go back to my father's house with me."

At the first pause in the impulsive torrent of his speech, the girl arose, with quiet dignity, and said: "Centurion, this is the presbyter, Epaphras, my guardian and friend. And this, father, is that centurion, Marcellus, of whom I have told thee."

Recalled to himself by her grave and quiet demeanor, the centurion saluted Epaphras respectfully, and said: "Thou must pardon my want of courtesy, for I have suffered so long, and was so rejoiced to find Dorcas again that I could think of naught else."

And turning unto Phœbe, the young man said kindly: "I rejoice to see thee, Phœbe, knowing well that thy presence here is a proof of thy truth and faithfulness. And I beg of thee to believe that I do entertain for thee all the respect and friendship which is due to girls who can be kind and faithful, and that cannot soil their lips with any false promise."

And Phœbe took the hand which Marcellus extended to her, and answered: "Truly, I came to Dorcas as I had promised thee, centurion; and she did agree to write unto thee a letter, which I was to have carried to thee, but thy coming unexpectedly hath marred our little plans. So that

thou and Dorcas must take the quarrel into your own hands, and leave me out of it. I bid you both good-by, and shall even pray often for the happiness of both." And, notwithstanding that they pressed her to remain, Phœbe lighted her little lamp and quietly departed. Epaphras asked him to be seated, and then said: "Where be thy companions? or didst thou come alone?"

"I am entirely alone," replied Marcellus, "or rather I followed close behind an aged woman, who unknowingly showed me the way."

The presbyter seemed much relieved by this information, and said: "Thou art very welcome, and so are all that may come peaceably."

Then Dorcas, whose hand he held and would not relinquish, gazed on his haggard face with tender, gleaming eyes, and spoke to him, saying: "Centurion, how didst thou find the way hither?"

Then he said: "Every moment since thou didst forsake us I have thought of thee only, and day by day I sought to find thee. From the information I did gather from many different sources, I thought the path which thou didst follow must be through that thicket in which, after weary days of watching, I finally discovered the entrance to this place by dogging the footsteps of an aged woman who came that way this morning. Dorcas, if I had found thee not I would have died!"

"Wert thou, then, in sight and hearing of the religious services of this little band of Christians from the time at which she whom thou didst follow entered here?" inquired Epaphras.

"Yea; I heard and saw all that occurred!"

"And didst thou behold any of those infamous and unholy ceremonies which the Romans of thy class attribute to the secret assemblies of the Christians?"

"Nay," replied Marcellus; "I cannot imagine a form of divine service more simple, sweet and pure, or more acceptable to any holy God. But the last, the Anastasis! That was a thing so very marvelous, so overwhelmingly grand and sublime in its simplicity, that my mind is stupefied by the event, and I can with difficulty credit my senses, which do assure me that I saw it! Was the man truly dead?"

"Ask thy father, the Vice-Prefect Varus, whether on yesterday evening the head of the Christian Charis was not given to his friends in one basket and his body in another?"

"It is an astounding fact," said Marcellus. "I cannot realize it. It transcends the power of magic."

"Didst thou see any magic used, except the name of Jesus Christ?"

"Nay, truly," said Marcellus, "I saw the Anastasis; but its very simplicity seems to demon-

strate its impossibility. Do, then, Christians, indeed, by faith in His name, suspend or annul natural laws at their own will?"

"Nay, verily," answered Epaphras, "but God so made the world that faith in Christ is sufficient for the justification of a sinner, and so that the faith of the church, organized in accordance with His will and obeying His commandments, hath force to raise the dead, and to do many other marvelous works, and we Christians believe that, as the winds blow or the rain falleth by His will, so do these works occur. But didst thou witness aught in all our service that can justify the Roman law which persecuteth us even unto death?"

"Nothing," cried Marcellus, "and henceforth my efforts shall not be spared to put an end to punishments so unprovoked and so unjust. Indeed, I cannot understand how conduct so injurious to a harmless people ever came to have the sanction of the Roman law?"

"That I will even now explain to thee," said Epaphras. "Three hundred years ago, the Jews who were expecting the coming of Messias, son of the One True God, were so blinded by their own pride, and ambition and selfishness, that they supposed He would come in power and great glory to overthrow their enemies and make Jerusalem the chief city of the world; although their own prophets had foretold that He would come as a

man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; poor, despised and afflicted; and when He did so come, teaching the brotherhood of man, teaching that war was crime, and ought to cease, and that no Christian should bear arms in any cause; teaching that slavery is sin against our fellow-men, who are, indeed, our own brethren; teaching communism of property and rights, as the only safeguard of the many against the superior intelligence, selfishness, and rapacity of the few, who always plunder and oppress the multitudes; teaching that marriage is a holy sacrament, founded upon mutual affection and consent, and that divorce is sinful, and destructive of society; teaching, in a word, that His kingdom, instead of being only a greater tyrant and warrior than any other kingdom, as they desired, should, indeed, be a democracy, pure and simple, social and political, based upon faith and communism, in which the family should be the foundation, and the Church the superstructure, of society. The Scribes and Pharisees, who were the rich, official, respectable classes of the Jews, and covetous of property and rank, accused Him of sedition, and instigated the Romans to crucify Him; which they did, in the days of Pontius Pilate, in accordance with the declarations of the prophets. The Roman emperors, from Tiberius until this very day, have persecuted the Christians for teaching and practi-

cing the gospel of Jesus. The brotherhood of all men, the denial of the right of the Christians to bear arms, the manumission of the slaves, the holding of all property in common, the abrogation of all social and political distinctions between men, and classes of men, that they may be one in Christ. The elevating of monogamic marriage into a sacrament, and the prohibition of divorce. These principles, based upon and enforced by faith, constitute the Christian democracy. These are the laws and the customs which the Christians keep as religion, and are those which the Romans have always condemned and punished, as 'a dire and malevolent superstition;' as inspired 'by hatred of the human race;' as 'contrary to reason and nature;' as 'extravagant laws and opinions;' as 'a criminal association.' But thou canst see, centurion, that no man is compelled to enter into the kingdom of Heaven? It is, and must be, his own voluntary act. And thou seest that this faith is peaceable and pure."

"Surely," said Marcellus. "But why do you not go into the forum, and into the Senate, and boldly proclaim this faith and demand recognition therefor at the hands of the emperor and the law?"

"Ah," said Epaphras, "dost thou believe that they who constitute the ruling classes at Rome would permit the public preaching of the gospel

of Christ, that teaches the fundamental truth that all men are, and of right ought to be, equal before God, consciousness and law? Or dost thou think that a rich man, except under the power of dominant, all-controlling faith, can overcome his selfishness, which is fortified behind the ramparts of civil and municipal law, so far as to seek admission into the Church of Christ, which holds all property in common and requires as a condition of admission the transfer of the believer's estate unto the common church? Or dost thou suppose that they who hold their fellow-men as slaves, and derive honor, consequence, convenience and wealth from this unjust ownership, would permit men to teach publicly as divine truth, and as the final utterance of law, philosophy and statesmanship, the gospel of Christ, which denies the master's title, manumits the slave, and raises the chattel to equality with other men, making him 'no more as a slave, but as a brother beloved'? Dost thou not see that if all Romans could be led to adopt this faith, the false and cruel social and political distinctions which are based on rank and wealth and power would fade out of the empire? Dost thou not see that if any man does in his heart believe that the safety of his soul and the welfare of his fellow-men depend upon the acceptance of this faith, he will then bestow his property upon the common church and become the brother of all

believers? And it is for that reason we Christians pray, saying, 'Give us daily bread sufficient for daily use.' We have no authority to pray for more, seeing that all that is over goeth into the common stock. Dost thou not perceive that if this gospel, which is 'good news' to the poor, could be publicly proclaimed, all the poor and all the slaves would take the kingdom of heaven by storm? Dost thou not see that the triumph of this gospel would abrogate the laws that maintain the idolatries of wealth, and rank, and property, and the power and influence of the robbers, usurers and extortioners who oppress the multitudes? Nay, verily, they crucified our Lord and have persecuted the church from that day until now because, and only because, they do not desire the common good, the general welfare, the public safety, prosperity and happiness of all, but prefer their own covetous desires for selfish aggrandizement, ease and power, to the regeneration of mankind."

The presbyter's sweet voice swelled into grand, sonorous utterances, and his face grew bright with holy earnestness and zeal as he proceeded with his exposition of the gospel. Dorcas sat quietly, while Marcellus listened, strongly moved and interested.

"But how knowest thou," he said, "that these teachings of thy Christ, these laws of His King-

dom, are divinely true and right, and obligatory upon all men? ”

“ I know this,” answered Epaphras, “ as thou canst not yet know it. But thou mayest test their verity by one safe rule: ‘ Do unto others as thou wouldst have them do unto you.’ ”

“ Let me understand that,” said Marcellus. “ If I would not wish to be degraded into slavery myself I must not own a slave! If that rule were carried out in all things, truly it would cut very deep! — and yet it seemeth right and just enough.”

“ Yea,” said Epaphras, “ and if thou wilt seek with honest manliness and courage to measure all things — social, political and religious, both governments and men — by that one rule thou shalt grow in knowledge of the truth. But it is time that I, and Dorcas also, go hence to other duties that claim our attention. Centurion, thou seemest an honorable man, and I desire thee to be on thy guard lest some carelessness on thy part may make thy discovery of our place of meeting lead to vexation of my faithful church.”

“ Thy warning is hardly necessary,” replied Marcellus, “ for I respect and esteem thee mightily, and I would protect Dorcas to the death. In fact, I came hither only to seek her, and to bear her away or perish in attempting it; but I confess to thee that my mind is much changed in many

things, and even in this resolve also. But Dorcas, my life, my darling," he cried, with that look of tender, pleading love which she found it so hard to resist, "I cannot leave thee, and I will not, unless thou promise that I may see thee again and speedily."

Dorcas turned unto the presbyter, saying: "Father, may he not come hither on next Sabbath morning?"

The presbyter sighed deeply enough, but answered: "Come thou hither on the Seventh morning hence, centurion; but go thou now in peace?"

"Verily," replied Marcellus, "it is not possible for me to find my way back whence I came. Let Dorcas guide me into that gallery which leadeth unto the entrance by which I came."

Epaphras seemed annoyed and perplexed at his request, but the girl turned to the centurion and laid her little hand lightly upon his arm, and gazing into his eyes with eyes in which beamed the soft light of mighty love and trust, she said, most sweetly: "Once thou didst make Dorcas flee away from thee in mortal terror; but now, centurion, is she not safe with thee?"

And the young man's eyes grew bright with tears of tenderness, as he replied: "Yea, by my soul, as safe as if thy mother held thee in her arms!"

Then the young girl took up her lamp, and gave Marcellus another, and placing her hand in his, she said: "Come on, centurion; I will be your guide."

The proud Roman youth respectfully saluted Epaphras, then, hand in hand, the twain walked on through the vast solitude and darkness of the catacombs.

"Dear Dorcas," he said, "why dost thou leave me so? If thou wilt come back to me, thou needst not offer sacrifice to any god of Rome; but I will build thee a beautiful chapel, and Epaphras and thy friends shall worship in thine own way, under the protection of my father. Darling, wilt thou not come? I cannot live without thee!"

But Dorcas said, with profound tenderness: "Let us not talk of that just now! I do not think thou yet understandest what we Christian maidens mean by love!"

And so they walked on, until they reached the gallery that led to the entrance by which the centurion had come.

Pausing here, the young girl said: "I leave thee now. Thy way is in this gallery, and thou canst not stray from it. When thou comest where the light of day showeth across thy path, extinguish thy lamp, and set it upon any projection of the rock which thou may'st find. When thou comest near the entrance, first look about thee care-

fully, and go not forth if any one be in sight of thee. Be careful not to let fall any word that might lead us into trial. Come on the morning of the Seventh day, and I will meet thee, and conduct thee to the chapel. Now bend down thy head to me," and as he complied with her request, she laid her arm lightly round his neck and kissed him tenderly, then turned away, and went swiftly back.

The young man sought not to detain her — did not call her back — but watched her lovingly as she glided swiftly away into the darkness, and a mighty joy came, wave-like, over his spirit, and he said to himself that the kiss which she had left upon his lips was the seal of a higher love and confidence than he had ever before dreamed of, and that he would prove worthy of the trust she had reposed in him.

Then, resuming his journey, he went on to the entrance, happy with the faint but exquisite dawn of a happiness different from all that he had ever known before.

CHAPTER XIII

BIRDS, BEASTS AND ORACLES THAT PROPHECY

IN the meantime, Maxentius, the Emperor of Rome, having heard vague rumors of the purpose of Constantine, who was then in Gaul, to reclaim the empire by force of arms, determined to make every possible effort to wage a successful war, and to add Gaul and Germany to his own dominions rather than to surrender the sovereignty of Italy, and limit his imperial claims to Spain and western Africa. He was a thorough pagan in every thought, purpose and desire of his soul, and was consequently the dupe of the priests who administered the religion of Rome. First of all, being terribly afraid to engage in war with Constantine, and desiring to fortify his courage by such confidence as superstition could generate in the heart of a heathen emperor, he secretly consulted the haruspices, auguries and oracles, and having construed all of their divinations to be favorable to himself and his purpose, with good hopes he entered upon the work of preparation for the impending war with Constantine. But not only did he desire to be assured in his own

mind that the gods were propitious unto him, he desired, also, to impress upon the whole Roman people the conviction that the immortals had solemnly pledged all heaven to give him the victory in the approaching contest. For this purpose he caused proclamation to be made throughout the city that upon a day appointed the Emperor would go in solemn state to the Temple of the Jupiter of the Capitol to consult the Pontifex Maximus, and have him publicly announce the divine will in regard to the issue of the war which seemed to all of them to be inevitable. It happened that the day named by Maxentius was the Wednesday after that Sabbath upon which Marcellus had discovered the retreat in which the maiden, Dorcas, abode, and had conversed with her and Epaphras, as hath been already narrated. The young man was dimly self-conscious that the idolatry of Rome was losing its life-long hold upon his intellect and conscience, but the process of disenchantment was so gradual and indefinite that he had no clear perception of it; and so when the Emperor and the great men of Rome, proconsuls, consuls, prefects, senators, ædiles, all persons of patrician rank, all officers of the legions stationed in and near the city, "and all Romans who were well-disposed toward the most holy Emperor Maxentius" were solemnly warned to observe the day, and to participate in the sacred ceremonies

by which the Emperor sought to learn the will of the gods concerning him, the young centurion, like the other young men of his own rank, joined the solemn procession that wended its way up to the Capitoline Hill, upon which stood the vast temple dedicated to the Jupiter of the Capitol.

It was a grand, impressive, and beautiful pageant. The Emperor went first on horseback, accompanied by his favorites of the palace, all clad in magnificent and variegated costumes appropriate to their different official stations about the person of the Emperor. Then followed proconsuls, consuls, ædiles, and prefects on foot — a throng of splendid men distinguished by mighty deeds done for Imperial Rome in every quarter of the then known world. Then came the august senators in solemn black, the severe and classic lines of the senatorial toga agreeing well with their most grave and reverent demeanor. Then followed in dense array, and in all the panoply of war, the officials and men of the legions, bearing standards which in other days they had advanced to victory in the fierce storm of battle in almost every province of the empire. After these came a mighty procession of wealthy and influential citizens, representing every grade and occupation known in the most populous and busy city in the world; and the long procession ended with a vast and indistinguishable crowd of plebeians, all of

whom, high and low, bore gifts unto the temple, each according to rank and station, to propitiate the gods.

Long before the hour of noon the hill was covered by the restless human sea that rolled away on every side, and surged over into the adjacent streets and vacant lots. All the vast area of the temple — at one end of which Maxentius and his immediate attendants stood upon a slightly elevated platform, while at the other appeared the altar and the statue of the god, far above which was a covered balcony for the vestal virgins — was confusedly crowded by the highest dignitaries of the Roman state, both civil and military, and by as many of those whom their rank, or some special permission allowed to intermingle with them, as could find space on which to stand.

The splendid altar glowed with various flames, and clouds of incense rose and filled the place while slowly drifting upward to the roof. Then from the lofty balcony on which they stood concealed by delicatest lattice work the vestal virgins chanted that lofty hymn which Callimachus, of Cyrene, composed in honor of the mighty Jove, and the sweet cadence of the mellifluous Greek verses wandered like angel voices all through the mighty temple. Then swinging the sacred censers with many graceful genuflections before the statue of the god, the Pontifex Maximus, clad in gor-

geous robes, embroidered with laces and woven gold and precious stones, prayed unto Jove to be most favorable to the Emperor, to accept the offerings made by him and by all pious citizens of Rome, and to indicate by the flight of sacred birds and by the entrails of the sacred beasts, and by the oracles, that he would give victory to Maxentius.

Afterward, the Pontifex Maximus took from the sacred cage the birds that prophesied, and placing them upon his wrists, released them at the open window in the rear of the altar, and he and the priests delegated for that office carefully noted their prophetic flight. The birds that had been well fed and long confined rose a short distance in the air and then circled around the temple on their unused and heavy pinions, and then, not caring to pursue their flight over the city to the distant fields and woods, soon sailed home and alighted upon the open window sill. Then the Pontifex Maximus took them and exhibited them unto Maxentius. Then he advanced to the edge of the raised platform on which the altar rested, and in a loud voice cried out: "Behold, the sacred birds have refused to leave the temple, and the holy, safe and prosperous city, but have come back. Thus the god promises to be propitious unto Rome."

Then the priests restored the birds to their

cages, and the assembled multitude burst into a shout of triumph: "Glory to the most holy Emperor Maxentius, to whom the god Jupiter is most favorable."

Close at hand, the priests, with their sharp, sacrificial knives, cut the throats of the beasts of sacrifice, and bore the reeking entrails, heart and livers, to the Pontifex Maximus, who diligently inspected them while the priests were burning at the altar such portions as were required to be burned in sacrifice. And again the Flamen of Jupiter advanced to the edge of the platform, and made proclamation that the augury was altogether favorable unto Rome. And once more a mighty shout of triumph pealed through the vast temple, and was taken up by those without and rolled down the slopes of the sacred hill, and spread throughout the waiting city.

Then said the Emperor Maxentius in a loud voice unto the Pontifex Maximus: "Thank thou the mighty god for me, and promise what thou wilt in my name unto the temple! But go now and consult the oracle!"

Then the Pontifex Maximus passed out of sight unto another chamber to the right hand of the altar, and after some small delay, during which an indistinguishable murmur came out from that place, the Pontifex returned, and, advancing once more to the edge of the platform, in a loud voice

answered: "The oracle sendeth to the most holy Emperor Maxentius and to the people of Rome this message: *Certum est Imperatorem Maxentium super esse Constantinum*. And again the vast multitude gave forth a shout of triumph, saying: "Glory to the most holy Emperor Maxentius, the conqueror of Constantine, to whom the oracle hath promised victory!"

Then, while the vestal virgins chanted, the Emperor left the temple, with his immediate attendants.

During the whole of these religious services, all of them were constantly engaged in conversation among themselves — talking of politics, of matters of private business or pleasure, or any other subject of mutual interest — and only when the Pontifex Maximus might come to the edge of the platform to announce the results of his divinations did any one think it necessary to keep silence, or to pay any attention to the sacred rites; and so, when it happened that Marcellus perceived among those who had obtained permission to enter into the body of the temple the grave face of the presbyter Epaphras, he stepped up to him, and courteously saluted him, and entered into a conversation with him — a rather unusual thing for any Roman of his rank to do with one of the despised sons of Israel.

"It is a grand ceremony, surely," the centurion

said. "How does it affect thee, Epaphras? How doth it seem compared with thine own simple worship?"

And Epaphras answered: "Yonder is the Flamen of Jupiter and his attendant priests, his oblations and altars, his ædiles and vestal virgins. Yonder is the Emperor Maxentius and his courtiers. These two parties are evidently interested in the sacred rites. Here, in the body of the temple, are the senators and chiefest men of Rome, who have, perhaps, a political interest in the result of the divinations. Outside, and all around, are thousands of citizens of the middle classes; and beyond these the vast and unconsidered multitude of plebeians. Wilt thou tell me, centurion, what part or interest these innumerable crowds can have in the grand service of this god? Except to bring unto the temple offerings whereby this splendid ritual may be maintained, and its costly observance paid for, what have they to do with it? What to them is this ornate temple service? How doth this religion in any wise affect their hearts and consciences, or how control and elevate their lives?"

"Truly," answered Marcellus, "they have nothing to do with it, except, as thou sayest, to bring their offerings to the temple, and await the proclamation of the Pontifex Maximus, or listen to the divinations by bird, and beast, and oracle.

But what wouldst thou have, then? It is not possible for every man to be a priest, and offer sacrifice, and interrogate the gods? ”

“ Ah,” said Epaphras, “ I would have but one Priest, that lives for ever, and that hath offered up Himself to be the one true sacrifice for the sins of all mankind; and I would have every man a worshiper, having access by faith in this one Priest and sacrifice, unto God, the Father of us all. I would have each man make true religion a matter personal to himself, so that, knowing the Priest and Sacrifice to have been both perfect man and true divinity — sinless, loving, and divine — the heart and life of the sincere worshiper might be transformed and renewed into the image and similitude of that holy life which this Priest and Sacrifice Himself did live! Knowest thou of whom I speak, centurion? ”

“ Yea; I do know! ” said Marcellus; “ but thou seemest in one particular to err; for we Romans do have private and personal worship, each man for himself, at home, or at the temple, as each one may choose, to any god whom he may trust the most! ”

“ Verily,” said Epaphras, “ he may sacrifice unto the gods at home, and all of his worship is the offering and the prayer that it may be accepted. He may go into the temple alone, and with his offering purchase the good-will of the

priest, but this worship, also, endeth with the gift, and the petition that it may be accepted. Ye thus seek to gain the divine aid for the accomplishment of personal ends, whether the thing for which ye pray be right or wrong; or else ye seek to expiate, pay for, some specific act of sin. Ye know nothing of sin, but only of sinful deeds, and the divine beauty and consolation of the idea of the forgiveness of sin is unknown to your religion. Hence thou knowest that in this personal religion of the Romans thou canst not find any one that prays for forgiveness of all sin and freedom from the dominion of it; but only seeking to expiate some vile, specific, sinful deed; thou wilt also find them beseeching some god to aid them in accomplishing a sinful purpose. Thou wilt find the adulteress praying that her husband may remain undeceived, and that her paramour may be prosperous and generous. Thou wilt find the *Hakiræ* beseeching *Venus* for larger profits from their impure and loathsome trade. Thou wilt find the thief praying unto the *Hermes Dolios* for skill and gains in the commission of an intended larceny, and promising a portion of his plunder for the favor of the god; thou wilt find young maidens dedicating their girdles and bracelets to *Athenis Aptera*; thou wilt find youths praying to *Hercules* or *Jupiter* to hasten the death of some rich relative in order that they may acquire his

estate; and thou wilt find baser criminals invoking the gods to aid them in greater crimes; but not one anywhere that seeketh after personal holiness, or prays to be delivered from the desire to sin. Centurion, knowest thou that all of this is true? ”

“Thou speakest truly,” replied Marcellus; “but one thought which thou hast uttered seemeth intangible to me. We know that a sinful act must be expiated; but thou seemest to draw a distinction between sin and a sinful deed. How is that? ”

“A sinful act,” said Epaphras, “is an intentional transgression; sin is nonconformity to the will of God; ye Romans seek to expiate the act. Ye know nothing of the forgiveness of sin; the change of heart and mind by which the will is conformed to the will divine. But an evil tree yieldeth evil fruits; a bitter fountain yieldeth bitter waters. The religion of Rome, and all others except His whose name we dare not mention in this place, seek to deal with sins which are the evil fruits, the bitter waters; but that one seeketh to make the tree good that the fruits may be good also; seeks to purify the fountain that its waters may be pure. For thou knowest, centurion, as every man must know, that if a man commit sin for which no expiation can be made, and the sorrow of the world taketh hold upon him, unless in his

time of trial he shall have strength and courage to look away beyond all this ornate priest-craft and pageantry, and in some form cast himself upon the mercy of an unknown God, the religion of thy country giveth him no hope nor help at all. But this unknown God, whom all men ignorantly do sometimes worship, is known to us that do believe, because He hath revealed Himself to us through that one Priest and sacrifice of whom we have been speaking. So that each individual man may, if he will, without any other sacrifice or priest whatever, by faith draw nigh unto God to the joy and consolation of his soul, finding true forgiveness even for sins that thy religion doth not pretend to expiate.

“Thou seest, therefore, that this religion is for every man; but the ornate and costly superstition of thy country is, for the most part, a business for the priests only, and for the Emperor; for the most part as much a department of the government, as much a political power, as are its military, police and mercantile laws and regulations. It is a human institution, dependent for its very existence and maintenance upon human laws and governments, blended with them and their purposes and interests, participating in all their wrongs; and is, therefore, of necessity in itself thoroughly secular and dishonest, and incapable of regenerating the life of any man or nation.”

"I think I comprehend thee mostly; but what dost thou mean by saying it is thoroughly secular and dishonest?"

"I mean that every such system is bound by the very conditions of its existence to give its sanction, in the name of God, to whatever the law of its domicile may prescribe, or else to cheat and juggle with false words and pretenses to hide its own repugnance, as thou hast seen done this very day."

"In what respect?" said Marcellus.

"Thou hast heard the Flamen of Jupiter declare that all the divinations were favorable unto Rome," replied Epaphras; "but that he was not asked about at all. He was asked whether the gods would give victory not to Rome but to Maxentius, and that he does not answer, because he does not know any more than thou dost. To this trick he had resorted because, if he answereth unfavorably to Maxentius, he dreads the imperial wrath; but, if he answer favorably, then he may soon have cause to tremble at the anger of Constantine, for the issue of the war is doubtful; he, therefore, saith 'favorable unto Rome,' in order not to be committed to either faction in the state, and leave room to translate his augury in accordance with the issue, however the matter may come to pass."

"That is, indeed, a sharp criticism upon the

Pontifex Maximus," answered Marcellus; "but art thou not mistaken? Did he not announce that the oracle had declared that Maxentius should overcome Constantine?"

"Wilt thou repeat the message of the oracle?" said the presbyter.

"Yea," replied the centurion; "the very words were: *Certum est Imperatorem Maxentium super esse Constantinum!*"

"And dost thou not perceive," answered Ephras, smiling; "that these words may just as well and as truly signify that 'Constantine will overcome Maxentius' as that 'Maxentius will overcome Constantine'? The Flamen of Jupiter hath used your Latin accusative with the infinitive verb to construct a sentence for the oracle having a perfect double meaning, so that no matter how the event shall come to pass, he may boldly tell the people that the oracle foretold it."

"The fraud is transparent; but how would the other religion have answered in such a case?" asked the centurion. "Not at all. They who believe it teach that all war is illegal and criminal. They dare not bear arms on either side, nor pray for the success of either party to a crime. But they continually pray for peace."

"I can hardly understand, even yet," replied Marcellus, "how a religion can be maintained without a government."

“Yet, if thou wilt consider the matter well,” said Epaphras, “thou wilt surely find that wherever and whenever religion is blended with government, it must necessarily be degraded into a mere ecclesiasticism, and so hopelessly incapable of taking one single step in advance of the laws in the enlightenment and regeneration of mankind. But the true religion, which hath for three centuries maintained itself, and hath spread abroad, even beyond the boundaries of the empire—in every quarter of the world—not only hath no government to support it, but hath been persecuted and outlawed by imperial Rome even from the beginning, and yet in spite of all opposing agencies, in secret, unheeded—almost unknown except to its own communities—it groweth continually. Because it is not a kingdom of this world; hath no partnership with any earthly kingdom; dependeth upon none of them, and is a personal matter to each individual man and woman unto whom its messages may come. So that if thou cast a man alone on rocky Patmos, or if thou drive him forth into the Libyan deserts, beyond all human companionship and aid; or if thou deprive him of hearing, sight, and speech, and chain him in the dungeon’s darkness and solitude, yet everywhere, in all times and places, he may, by faith in our one Priest and Sacrifice, hold sweet communion with the God and Father

of all. And no mortal enginery on earth can deprive even the poorest and meanest of the disciples of the consolations of his faith, or prevent him from offering up acceptable worship to his God. It would gratify me much, centurion, to have thee examine, with equal care and candor, those salient points of difference between the religion of Rome and all others on the one side, and that one of which we have been speaking; for I desire thy welfare."

But the services were ended, the Emperor was withdrawing from the temple, and Marcellus being required to resume his station among his brother-officers, they two parted courteously, and each one went his way.

CHAPTER XIV

IN WHICH MARCELLUS DISCOVERETH A BAR- BARIAN

DURING all the week the young man seemed to himself to live upon the memory of his visit to the Christian chapel in the catacombs, and the new and wonderful experience which he had encountered there. He thought that he was happier than he had ever been before, and his step once more grew elastic and his visage bright.

The Vice-Prefect saw this joyous change, and imagined it to have resulted from the fact that the youth had thus quickly mastered the passion which seemed to have been consuming him, but made no inquiries — satisfied to see that the centurion had resumed the cheerful discharge of duty, and had ceased to wander with aimless step and hopeless countenance along the Appian Way.

This conversion to a physically normal and healthful condition was accompanied also by changes in his moral and mental constitution of which the youth was almost unconscious. His nature was softening under the influence of the higher and purer culture with which he had come

into brief and pleasant contact. Even the fashionable brutalities and sensualisms of Rome were growing distasteful to him. The lascivious exhibition of the theater seemed to him in some undefined, intangible way to be degrading not only to the shameless actresses who trod the stage, but to all true womanhood; and the cruel and murderous scenes of the Coliseum no longer elicited his admiration nor extorted his applause. The splendid barbarian was becoming refined by association with loving charity, which even yet he knew not how to appreciate at its true value, and with living truth, that he had only seen in evanescent gleams and "as through a glass darkly."

He knew nothing of the division of time by Sabbaths, a custom common to both Jews and Christians, but he counted the days until the seventh, and rejoiced like a child as the number grew less and less between him and the day of his promised meeting with Dorcas, and when the seventh day had come, very early in the morning, with quick, elastic steps and beaming eyes he strode once more along the Appian Way.

The passionate, fierce desire to possess the object of his affections, which, indeed, was all that the sensual Romans knew of love, had almost faded out of his heart, and slowly but beautifully, as a rose unfolds in dew and starlight, a dim consciousness was blooming in his spirit that the love

which alone could be worthy of Dorcas was that affection which seeketh, first of all, the happiness of the one beloved. He could not have uttered this dawning perception in any form of words, but it elevated and refined him; and with a sense of sweeter and higher happiness, he hastened to the entrance of the catacombs.

Dorcas was there awaiting him. The morning light toyed with her golden hair, the loving light caressed her glorious face and lissome form, and a light more pure and enchanting than the rising dawn slept in her azure eyes. She sprang forward to meet him, and extended both her little hands, which the centurion gently took in his own, and then stood looking down upon her glowing face with throbbing heart and beaming eyes, and softly said: "Wilt thou not kiss me, Dorcas?"

"Yea, gladly and lovingly," she answered, with a happy smile. She was so happy. Only a month ago he would have seized her in his arms, even against her will, and would have crushed her rosebud mouth with cruel, sensual lips — she saw the mighty difference and rejoiced. He felt the mighty difference in his very soul, and the consciousness of it both humbled and exalted him.

Then said he most tenderly: "I have been a brute unto thee, Dorcas; thou must forgive me, darling, for I did not know!" and she answered to him: "Surely thy fault is hardly personal to

thee, Marcellus, seeing that it was but that of Roman civilization and of paganism!" Then with a sweet blush spreading over her exquisite face, in low, delicious, happy tones, she said: "I love thee, Marcellus; I do love thee dearly! Thou hast large capacities for good in thy strong, pure heart and mind!"

Then it seemed to him as if scales had fallen from his eyes that he might all at once perceive how hard, selfish and sensuous was the life of the practical Romans, and what wide possibilities of purer, higher, nobler existence might be for him and other men. Rome herself was beginning to appear to him but as a barbarian compared with what might be, even as the tribes of Gaul and of Germania seemed barbarous when compared with Rome; except that the comparison between the barbarians and Rome referred to physical progress and intellectual life alone, while that to which Rome was like a barbarian was neither intellectual nor physical, yet what it was he did not clearly understand; but as to the crystalline chastity of that world of thought, emotion, purposes — in which both Dorcas and Epaphras dwelt — the centurion discovered himself to be but a barbarian.

Then once more, hand in hand, bearing their lighted lamps, the twain trod through the long galleries together, and once more, at every new

passage which they reached and sought to enter, a voice of one unseen cried out: "Walk thou by faith!" and Dorcas sweetly answered: "In His name!" and so they went on until the lighted chapel opened in their path, wherein many had already assembled. And Dorcas said: "Wilt thou not enter in and sit with me? No one objecteth here to any peaceful visitor, and thou wilt learn nothing that can injure thee."

Then passed he with her into the chapel and they sat together, and in low tones, that seemed most fitting to the place and the surroundings, talked they of many things.

And while the congregation was assembling, the centurion observed that when they came in, one by one, or two by two, all adult persons, and some even of the children, stepped quietly into an alcove made in the side of one of the galleries, where was a table having a box on the top thereof and a lamp burning above it, and in a moment more returned and took their seats. "Dorcas," said he, "what ceremony taketh them into that place?"

And she said: "We Christians make a weekly offering of whatever each may have above that which is necessary for himself and family, and this goeth into the common treasury, for the common good, to be applied as our deacons, or stewards, may direct. They are making their of-

ferings now. Therefore we pray: 'Give us our daily bread,' which prayer would be but mockery of God if we should violate the law of Christ by 'laying up treasures in our private storehouses for future use.' We Christians live, as men of Rome would say, 'from hand to mouth;' but the common church accumulates for all."

"And if misfortune overtaketh any one," said Marcellus, "how doth he live, having given all that he had unto the church?"

"All the church hath is his," said Dorcas, "according to his necessities. So that among us those who are given little lack nothing, and those to whom much is given have nothing over; but there is enough, and to spare, for all."

"I have a few pieces with me," said Marcellus; "thinkest thou that they would take it kindly if I put them in the box?"

"They solicit no one," she answered, "nor have they any right to reject the offering of any that is made with hope that it may accomplish good. But thou, centurion," she added with a kindly smile, "must not forget that, when thou casteth money into the treasury, thou art aiding the despised and persecuted cause of Christ."

For an instant the young man's cheek burned with an angry flush, but it passed off as quickly as it came, and he quietly went forward and emptied his purse into the treasury, and then re-

sumed his seat beside her, saying: "I hope that even the pitiful sum I had with me may do some little good."

By this time all the congregation had assembled, and thereupon the presbyter Epaphras entered into the chapel, and seeing Marcellus there, he advanced and kindly greeted him; and having taken his station upon the platform, the congregation rose, and with right hand uplifted, repeated in solemn tones the declaration of their faith. And the ceremonies proceeded as upon the preceding Sabbath, except that there was no Anastasis of the dead, and Epaphras occupied the time which had been consumed by that service upon the former occasion by a short address or "sermon," as Dorcas denominated it.

The centurion listened to the first Christian sermon he had ever heard with a strange, absorbing interest. A world of light broke in upon his spirit when the presbyter said: "Ye see, therefore, beloved, that there never was, and never can be, a false religion in the world, inasmuch as all religion is in itself only the utterance of the heart's deathless yearnings for the one true God, after whom the human race seeketh, and whom the heathen do ignorantly conceive to dwell in the bright stars above us, or in idols of wood and stone, which are the workmanship of their own hands. And this honest, universal, but mistaken effort of sin-blinded

men to bestow a physical, tangible shape and existence upon the one true God hath filled the world with idols — the false conceptions and human representations of Him that is invisible except unto the eye of faith; that is a spirit, and is only worshiped truly by those that worship Him in spirit and in truth; whom our Lord Jesus Christ hath revealed to them that love Him." Because from the worship of the idolaters itself, and from the lessons of the Platonic philosophy then current in the city of Rome, it appeared to him with almost startling vividness that if the one God of the Christians be substituted for all others, and the Christ taken as the fulfillment of Plato's splendid vision of the Divine Man that was to instruct men in the will of God and reconcile them to His ways, all that he had been taught to regard as religion would be wonderfully simplified, and this very simplicity itself seemed to demonstrate its truth. But the departing of the congregation broke the thread of his meditations, and soon all others had gone except Epaphras, Dorcas and himself.

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CHAPTER XVI

IN WHICH THERE IS SOME TALK OF MARRIAGE

AFTER the conclusion of the services in the chapel in the rock, Epaphras said to Marcellus: "I rejoice, centurion, to see thee among us here again, and hope that thou mayest learn to love our simple form of worship, and that thou wilt never find aught therein which should rightfully subject us to the malediction of good men or of righteous laws?"

"If all Christians be such as thou and Dorcas," said the centurion, "I would gladly learn the faith which worketh out characters so perfect."

"Thou lovest the maiden, then?" said Epaphras, striving in vain to conceal his agitation.

"Yea," answered Marcellus, taking the girl's hand in his, "I love her as I do mine own life, and more!" But Epaphras indicated to Dorcas that he wished to converse with the centurion alone, and so the maiden withdrew to the women's apartments.

"And, notwithstanding," said Epaphras, in slow, deliberate tones that seemed to place an emphasis on every word, "thou didst offer unto

her not long ago the grossest insult that a Christian maiden can receive." The young centurion's face became flushed and troubled. But at length he said:

"I have even told Dorcas that I was as a brute, or a barbarian, to her, and she knoweth well that it was the barbarism or brutality of ignorance. But to speak the very truth, even yet I do not understand why my love for her was a thing so different from what it ought to have been, and, if thou canst credit me, so different from what now it is!"

"Didst thou not know, then," said Epaphras, "that what thou calledst love without marriage is unpardonable sin and hopeless degradation to every Christian woman, and that marriage without love is in no respect a better or more honorable thing?"

The youth flushed vividly; but his brave, sincere nature asserted itself, and he answered by a simple, straightforward statement of the truth, saying:

"Verily, I did not. I call to witness all gods, both thine and mine, that I believed and know that nearly all the Roman youth, of both sexes, do believe that such love as I did offer Dorcas is better far for her, or any other girl, than to assume the burdens and the bonds of matrimony, from which both men and women in Rome recoil with such

strong loathing that we have enacted the Julian and Papinean laws, and other laws, to compel the unwilling citizens to contract marriages. O gladly would I take Dorcas to be my wife; but I did think that the arrangement I proposed to make was far better, both for her and me, than matrimony. And, while now I love the maiden otherwise, and feel, somehow, that the former arrangement is not a fit nor proper one for her, I tell thee, Epaphras, in perfect truth, that I cannot understand *why* this is so or how it happeneth!"

"That I will even tell thee," answered the presbyter. "It is because thou hast begun to realize the truth that ye Romans are not fit to be true husbands or true wives."

"And why not?" said Marcellus. "There is no finer race of beings on the earth."

"Because," said the presbyter, "the union of men and women, even on the basis of physical and intellectual excellencies alone, is but a commerce of more gifted brutes, and is no real marriage, which is a higher and purer relation for which ye Romans are not fit, because 'your lasciviousness and unchastity have been so notorious for centuries that when the emperor sought to reform manners by the Julian law your wives and mothers did not hesitate to escape the legal penalties of adultery by exchanging the decent

stole of matronhood for the toga of the avowed courtesan, to whom the law did not apply.' Ye never knew what a true marriage is. 'Ye publicly boast that ye have renounced marriage, and public confidence in marriage and the family tie is shaken to its center;' and, 'on the other hand, the women themselves, insulted by the neglect of the other sex, and exasperated at the inferiority of their position, avenge themselves by holding the institution of legitimate marriage with almost equal aversion. They are indignant at the state of servitude to which it binds them, the state of legal dependence in which it keeps them; for it leaves them without rights, even without the enjoyment of their own property; it reduces them to the state of mere children, or rather transfers them from the power of their parent to that of their husbands. They continue through life, in spite of the mockery of respect with which your laws surround them, *things* rather than *persons*; things that can be sold, transferred backwards and forwards from one master to another for the sake of their dowry, or even for their powers of child-bearing.' Ye degrade and despise your women so much that, long ago, the Censor Metellus, in your august senate, said: 'Could we exist without wives at all, doubtless we should all rid ourselves of the plague they are to us; since, however, nature hath decreed that we cannot dispense

with the affliction it is better to bear it manfully, and rather look to the permanent conservation of the state than to our own transient gratification'; and Augustus, a hundred years afterwards, recited this invective in your senate, and ye had to resort to stringent laws to compel your citizens to marry. And ye despised women so thoroughly that the most of them were destroyed in infancy, and those who survived were not esteemed worthy to have a prenomen — left even nameless. And it resulted from this degradation of the sex that your women, uninstructed, ill-treated, half-employed, threw themselves with all the passionate self-abandonment of their weaker natures into the worship of Anubis and Astarte, and all the libidinous sensualism of Egypt and of the East; and as ye became more and more degraded the men followed them until your whole social life-path became utterly infamous and unclean. So it hath been throughout the world; women are thoroughly despised, and the wife is everywhere a slave. But our Saviour Christ, that hath addressed His gospel to each individual and not to any sect or nation, and hath devolved upon each one for himself a personal responsibility that implies, in the very definition of it, personal rights as well as duties — a responsibility which is necessarily and eternally antagonistic to *all* slavery — hath also emancipated the wife from the condition of a

slave, and hath elevated her to the equal station of a companion, counselor and friend by ordaining monogamic marriage to be a sacrament of religion, based upon mutual affection and consent, and by prohibiting divorce. So thou must see, centurion, that the love of a Christian for his wife is quite another thing than the unlicensed passion of a Roman, and than the contract, founded upon interest and expediency, by which a wife is taken. Thou seest clearly that a Christian marriage sanctifies sexhood, elevates women, and renders the family tie a sacred and indissoluble one that forms the basis of society. And if thou wilt seriously consider all these things thou canst not fail to understand what a pure and holy thing is that which Dorcas calleth 'love,' nor of what manner of love he should be capable that deserveth to have her for his wife."

Then the centurion answered: "I am a very young man, and have never had inclination or occasion to examine many of the matters of which thou speakest, and I feel rather than understand the meaning of thy words. But I perceive clearly that thou knowest how to lay thy heavy hand upon every sore place that afflicteth the Roman body politic. If any man doubt that the Romans themselves comprehend the vast evil of war, slavery, intemperance, usury, and luxury, a knowledge of the laws continually enacted, and re-

enacted so ineffectually, would certainly remove his doubts. But while the Romans know and regret the terrible decadence of all public and social integrity and virtue, they know not any statute or custom that can arrest its downward progress; and so we live as we can under the laws and customs which have grown upon us. Dost thou know any law, Epaphras, that might accomplish the various reformatations contemplated by such enactments as the Julian law, the Oppian and Vaconian laws, and the law of Augustus?"

"Nay, verily!" replied the presbyter; "no human statute can remedy these evils, or even reach the seat of the universal malady. The larger wisdom of our Saviour Christ is manifested by the fact that He did know it was a vainer thing than beating of the wind to enact any such laws — the most perfect code of which the Jews had tested for long centuries — and hence, the divine truth, by which He purposeth to accomplish the regeneration of mankind, never assumed the shape of a statute to govern Christians or Jews, Greeks or barbarians; was never confirmed by the infliction of any temporal penalties, but is addressed to each individual man *as man*. He constantly saith 'every man,' 'any man,' 'whosoever will;' and His gospel is not addressed to any sect, corporation, government, or class — social or political — but to the individual; and no mortal

enginery on earth can either compel the individual to do, or to leave undone, what is essential to his becoming a Christian. So, centurion, thou seest that while no man can reform and regenerate the Roman world, and is, therefore not responsible for that it is not done, any can, if he will, our Lord helping him, reform, regenerate, and purify his own heart and life, and he is held to be personally accountable for his failure to do so. The Kingdom of Heaven, the Church of Christ, to-day, unseen and unknown, extends throughout the empire, and even further than the power of Rome hath ever gone; but the faith which justifies the individual is personal and peculiar to each man, and is beyond the reach of any human statute. But it is the Sabbath day, and I, and also this young deaconess, Dorcas, have yet many duties to discharge, so that thou mayest go in peace, and come again upon the Seventh day hence, if such be thy desire."

Then the centurion and Epaphras saluted each other with great kindness, and Dorcas having been recalled, she and Marcellus took up each a lamp, and, hand in hand, they twain trod the long galleries once more until they reached that one which led on to the entrance by which the young man came. And as they walked on the centurion said: "What is the Sabbath, Dorcas?"

And she answered: "It is the Seventh day

upon which our Lord arose from the dead after that He had been crucified under Pontius Pilate; and every Sabbath we Christians celebrate His resurrection in the communion, as he commanded."

"Arose from the dead after that he had been crucified!" said Marcellus, amazedly.

"Yea! Surely thou canst not think it an incredible thing that God should raise Him from the dead, when thou hast seen with thine own eyes the Anastasis of our brother Charis?"

"That is most true," said Marcellus. "But, Dorcas, are there no books containing the history of these things? Epaphras talks to me most kindly and learnedly, but somewhat too much with reference to large questions of social and political truth. But I would fain know more of this same Jesus—more that is personal to Him; more of what He said, and did, and felt, and thought, and suffered! Are there such books, Dorcas, anywhere?"

And a glad light glorified her speaking countenance as she replied:

"Yea, thou most dear Marcellus. I will obtain for thee by next Sabbath the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, and thou mayest read the holy Scriptures for thyself."

"And, Dorcas, what is it to be a deaconess, as Epaphras said thou art?"

"It is to aid in caring for the chapel, and in the

preparation of the bread and wine, and to distribute to the women of our community out of the treasury, according as each hath need, either permanently or by reason of some temporary necessity."

"And thy parents, Dorcas, where are they?" asked Marcellus.

"Both suffered martyrdom for the faith of Jesus when I was yet in infancy."

"Ah! I remember to have heard thee say they died when thou wast very young, but thou didst not say how. Both martyrs! Dorcas, dost thou not hate Rome and the Emperor, and every Roman, for this cruel wrong?"

"Nay, nay, centurion! Hast thou not heard us pray for our enemies, and for the Emperor and all others in authority! I pity and forgive them! I doubt not that just men even have persecuted us in all good conscience, ignorantly, as did Saul of Tarsus, of whom thou mayest read in the beautiful parchments I shall get for thee."

"It is most strange and moving," cried Marcellus. "Tacitus saith that the Christians are 'full of hatred for the human race.' Yet I see that ye Christians hate no one, and even pray for those who persecute you!"

They walked on in silence, the centurion almost oppressed with meditations upon the new and wonderful life that was slowly revealing itself to his

astonished intellect, and upon the more wonderful changes that seemed to be in progress in the depths of his own nature; and the young girl watched him with patient love and hope. And when they had reached the gallery which she had already named "Marcellus Way," she lifted her glad face to his saying: "Kiss me, love, and go in peace."

The youth saluted her with a respect and loving kindness that seemed to him new, strange and exquisite, and as he wended his way on to the upper world the fullness of his heart uttered its joy in low and loving words: "There is none like her! There is none! There is no love like mine in all the world! It is a new fire stolen from heaven most blessed, warm and pure, such as no Roman hath ever known before. It is not in the sweet verse of Sappho, and Hesiod's perfect melodies know naught of it! Nor breathes it out of any music of Anacreon's lyre! That which Ovid and Tibullus sing of love is but licentiousness compared with it, and compared with it the finest odes of Horace are unclean, dead and cold! For there is none like her in all the world — not one!"

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CHAPTER XVI

IN WHICH EUSEBIUS OFFERETH THE SWADDLING-
BANDS UNTO THE CHURCH

AFTER that embassy which went out of Rome secretly to wait upon Constantine at Lutetia, and to solicit him to march into Italy and free them from the tyranny of Maxentius, had separated at the foot of the Alps, as hath already been narrated, those who were to return to the city did successfully perform their journey; and likewise those who were to return to Lutetia to communicate to Constantine those things which had been made known by Eusebius, arrived safely and speedily. And Constantine gladly received them, and having been fully advised of all that Eusebius had declared, he dismissed those deputies to Rome again with instructions to inform the patricians, senators and Christians who were moving in the matter, "That never, either in Britain or in the West, under the government of his father nor under his own, had the Christians been persecuted; that on the contrary, both from the accounts of them which Pliny had given to Trajan, and from all that he had learned concern-

ing them from other sources, he had formed a very favorable opinion of the Christians, and had great regard for Jesus Christ, of whom, indeed, he had long desired to know more, but had hitherto been prevented by the constant pressure of public affairs; that if the Christians should be able and willing to give him any effectual aid in consolidating the empire, and in preventing the devastation of Italy by a protracted civil war, he would guarantee to them entire freedom in the public exercise of their religion; that an embassy from their bishops, or from the churches, would be granted safe conduct and kind usage if they desired to confer with him in regard to these things; and that he did not desire declamations, which might mean much or little, but accurate information, whereby he would be enabled to judge for himself of their ability to render effective aid, and proper assurances of their willingness to do so."

And having dismissed them with this message, Constantine so effectually furthered them upon their journey that they, too, safely arrived at Rome only a few days after the return of those with whom Eusebius had come. And the message of the emperor having been communicated by those who brought it to the patricians and senators who were transacting the business, they met together secretly, and had Eusebius come to

them, whom they informed fully, and commissioned to lay open the matter to the churches, and ascertain both the opinion of the Christians concerning it, and, also, the facts about which Constantine sought to be informed. And thereupon Melchiades, the Bishop at Rome, invited the presbyters in the city, and bishops and presbyters throughout all Italy, to assemble upon a day named at the chapel in the catacombs to consider of the things proposed.

And at the appointed time they assembled secretly in the chapel of Epaphras to the number of about three hundred; and the Roman bishop having called the assembly to order, first of all stated to them clearly and perspicuously the business upon which they had been summoned, and afterward they united in prayer to God that His Spirit might so guide their deliberations that their action should be for the glory of God and for the good of the common church. And, therefore, the bishop said:

“If any one hath counsel to offer, let him speak.”

Then many gave their opinions; many asked for further information; many suggested difficulties and objections; and little by little the business was explored to the bottom, and gradually the assembly became divided in sentiment upon the very core of the whole question into two parties, whereof

Eusebius led one party, and Epaphras, the presbyter, led the other.

"It is agreed upon common consent," said Eusebius, "both from the character of the Emperor Constantine and from the fact that no persecution of Christians hath been permitted by him, or by his father, that we may safely rely upon his pledge to protect the church upon the conditions stated. Ye know, brethren, that from the days in which our Lord tabernacled in flesh, even until this hour, the church hath been bleeding at every pore. Ten different times, under ten different emperors, persecution hath taken the form of laws for the destruction of Christianity, and the followers of Jesus have been tried beyond all human endurance. The question, therefore, in brief, is simply whether the church shall give aid to Constantine for the recovery of his rightful heritage, in exchange for his imperial protection, and so be enabled to come forth into the broad light of day, and proclaim, without fear or molestation, the gospel of our Lord! Or whether she shall contumaciously reject proffered peace and protection, and thereby justify the accusation of the pagans that we Christians are inspired with hatred of the human race, and, as a natural consequence, continue to suffer from the hatred and persecutions of the world, which have been so grievous ever since Diocletian issued the edicts for

our destruction in the years 303 and 304, which hard laws the present Emperor Maxentius strictly enforceth everywhere; so that neither at home, nor on the way, nor even here beneath the surface of the earth hath any Christian assurance of his life.

“When I think of how the church must triumph under the imperial protection — how in place of being outcast, persecuted and despised, she would at once become honorable and respectable in the eyes of the heathen; when I think of what vast opportunities for greater good the emperor’s favor will afford, it seemeth to me that it would be mere madness and fanaticism to reject these overtures of peace and protection, and willfully cast aside the honor, wealth, power and glory which the long and sorely persecuted church must begin to gather as the fruits of the proposed alliance!”

To him Epaphras thus replied: “Brethren, I marvel greatly that any Christian bishop should even speak to you of earthly honor, wealth, power and glory; and marvel more that he should advise you to follow after all these things, for which, indeed, the heathen seek. Will some one tell me what business we Christians have with any ‘honor’ except that of our Lord? With any ‘wealth’ except the unsearchable riches of Christ? With any ‘power’ except the power of the Holy Ghost? With any ‘glory’ except to glory in the

cross of Jesus Christ our Lord, by which we are crucified unto the world and the world unto us?

“They propose an ‘alliance’ between the church, the bride of Jesus, and the Roman Empire. Let us consider what is involved in this proposed blending of light and darkness; this concord between Belial and Christ.

“So far as spiritual truth is concerned, we must blend the faith of Christ with that of pagan Rome — a thing impossible for Christian men to do — or Constantine must subvert the whole vast machinery of heathen law and religion, and I ask you to consider whether that is possible for him.

“So far as the sociology and politics of the kingdom of Heaven is concerned, either the church must abandon the gospel of Christ and be conformed unto the world, or else the Romans must subvert the empire before any such alliance can be possible! Unjust wars, prosecuted for gain and conquest through the four quarters of the world, are the chief glory of Rome, imbedded in her laws and customs, in her traditions and religion. But ye all do know that our Lord Jesus Christ hath forbidden Christians to bear arms at all, and ye know that from the sorrowful night in which Peter smote the high-priest’s servant and cut off an ear, for which our Lord rebuked him, no Christian, and no body of Christians, hath ever lifted up a carnal weapon, even in self-defense.

How can these antagonistic principles of action unite? Will the empire abolish war? or can the church consent to see her redeemed sons enrolled among the butchers and stabbers, paid and trained, to murder other men for whom also our Saviour died?

“Ye know also that the greater part of the people of the empire and of Italy, and of Rome especially, are slaves, and that the slave-code is rooted in the laws, customs, traditions, and religion of the empire. But ye also know that Jesus teaches the inevitable personal responsibility of every man — a responsibility based as much upon rights for man as upon duties — a truth which is, logically and spiritually, the antithesis of that enslaved condition in which our Lord’s advent found the human race; ye know that under the power of the Holy Ghost slavery hath faded just in the ratio that the church hath triumphed, because Jesus promised that the truth should make us free, and the liberty of the gospel is a charter of freedom to the slave. How can there be concord or alliance between this gospel and the Roman slave-code? Dare ye to seal with the precious blood of your crucified Redeemer a compact giving the sanction of His church to human slavery? Or think ye that the ruling classes of the empire will voluntarily abolish this inhuman wrong, and of their own accord surrender the

profit which they have by the ownership of men, and the convenience and consideration they derive therefrom?

“Ye know that the laws, customs and religion of the empire are founded upon the false and cruel, social and political distinctions which grow, like poison-weeds, out of accidents of rank, prerogative, and wealth! These are the real gods of the idolators; these the rewards which Mammon offers to his votaries! But ye also know that our Lord Jesus required all such distinctions to be abolished among all those who believe; that they may be brethren, that they may call no man master, since one is their master, even Christ, and, therefore, to hold all property by a communal title, and not by any individual right or claim. Ye know that when some, through want of faith, endeavored to gain admission into the church, and at the same time to evade the binding obligation of that fundamental law of the kingdom which required them to put their private wealth into the common fund, Peter declared that their crime was an attempt to deceive the Holy Ghost and to defraud the church, and the wrath of God fell on them so that they died; and ye know that of all the countless idols of the heathen our Lord denounces one by name — Mammon. To worship whom is only to adopt social and political systems which recognize and maintain individual right to

acquire, hold and transmit property, thereby making all pagan governments inure to the benefit of the few and to the oppression of the many, and rendering true liberty and religion impossible for the masses of mankind. How can there be alliance between Christ's common church and the Roman Empire? Think ye that unconverted men will transfer their riches to the church, and consecrate unrighteous mammon to the good of all, in order to gain admittance thereto? Verily, a camel shall sooner pass through a needle's eye! Or, will ye dare with sacrilegious hands to seal a compact binding the church to give her sanction to property — laws directly antagonistic to the fundamental law of the church — laws that practically make riches God?

"If ye shall induce the church of Christ to adopt and endorse the social, political and religious system of Rome, that is simply to abandon Jesus, and there are many who will refuse, at any hazard, to follow you one step! If ye shall induce the church to make a covenant with Constantine that he will shove pagan gods aside, and substitute for them a secularized church, bearing the same relation to the empire that paganism now sustains, that is only to *set up the Anti-Christ*; and Constantine is he!

"Moreover, brethren, ye all know that to abandon communism of believers is to surrender,

also, the thaumaturgical powers which are appurtenant to the common church only, and can only be exercised for the common good of all Christians; and the ecclesiasticism which ye shall have substituted for the gospel will be a human institution that must be perpetuated by only human agencies or fail; because when ye accept this allowance ye abandon all of the gospel except the single spiritual truth of justification by faith, which truth alone may save some souls of man, but never can convert mankind.

"I, therefore, counsel that we at once decree that the church cannot make an alliance with any temporal government without abandoning the gospel of Christ, and that this we will not do, preferring rather, if need be, the sword, the fagots and the cross, as from the beginning our fathers have always done."

Then a clamor arose, many crying out: "It is enough!" "Take a vote!" "We will die for Christ, but will not betray him!" "It is too much to pay for peace!"

And Eusebius, well seeing that if a vote were taken then, the proposition of Epaphras would prevail by the common consent, arose, and, with his wonderfully persuasive voice and manner, spoke as follows: "Brethren, if, indeed, the acceptance of the emperor's proposal should involve any such consequences as have been urged by the

most pious and learned Epaphras, I freely admit that we ought at once to reject it. But if we be agreed that we cannot accept this proposition, ye all see that there certainly can be no need to affront the haughty and powerful Constantine by rough or precipitate action. On the contrary, as far as in us lies we should endeavor to live peacefully with all men. I, therefore, counsel that the matter be not finally determined at this time, but rather that we leave it undetermined (which, indeed, seemeth sufficient to accomplish all that the excellent Epaphras desireth), and that in the meantime we take proper steps both to furnish the emperor with the information which he has very kindly and courteously desired, and also to learn with preciseness just what he would require of the church, and that we carefully consider how, and to what extent, that which he may really desire can affect the spread of gospel truth. And I counsel this all the more earnestly, brethren, because I have both seen and conversed with the man Constantine, and believe that he is intellectually a greater man than any other Roman. He is most temperate, studious and chaste. He is very favorably inclined to our holy faith, and we should not quench the smoking flax. Let us, therefore, delay; and if we should find it proper to reject all overtures that may be made, let us so act as that the emperor may perceive our re-

fusal to be of conscience only, and not of pride, hatred or uncharitableness. For I yet hope to see this emperor a Christian."

Then, cried out Epaphras in a loud voice: "Thou knowest that no emperor can be a Christian; for a Christian must be the brother, not the legal master, of other Christians. The church can recognize no king but Christ!"

But, nevertheless, the moderate counsel of Eusebius prevailed, and Christ suffered again from the unchristian spirit of compromise which made the Procurator Pontius Pilate seek to wash his own hands clean of the innocent blood!

And so the bishop was instructed to send an embassy to Constantine, with accurate information of the numerical strength and other resources of the church; and to learn with exactness what might be those conditions on which a heathen emperor would take under his protection the church of the living God.

CHAPTER XVII

IN WHICH THE BARBARIAN IS CIVILIZED

MEANTIME the centurion had made his weekly visit to the catacombs, and Dorcas had given to him beautiful parchments containing the Four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, and the young man had read them over and over again with a strange, absorbing interest, and especially the very words of Jesus, until he could have written out from memory almost every passage contained therein. He desired to understand precisely what Christianity, as Christ Himself propounded it, really contained, and believed that he had done so.

After the services were ended upon the following Sabbath, and he and Epaphras and Dorcas had remained in the chapel after the withdrawal of the congregation, as was their pleasant custom, Marcellus handed back the parchments to Dorcas, saying: "I thank thee much, dear Dorcas, for the privilege of perusing these wonderful books, which I have read a number of times over with continual delight and interest. Somehow the

heart ever groweth more warm unto this sinless, loving Nazarene, and the mind seems to be exalted and chastened by reading what these Gospels say of Him. I desire to have a copy thereof made for mine own use, and if it is permitted to do so, I will bring hither the parchments; and wilt thou aid me?"

"Nay, friend," said Dorcas. "These are even thine; for with mine own hand began I long ago to transcribe them for thee. Nevertheless, thou hadst best leave them here until this prosecuting spirit of the Romans shall exhaust itself, as it would be dangerous to have them found in thy possession."

"And thou didst write these books," he said, looking at the voluminous manuscript, "for me? Ah, Dorcas, thou canst not know how sacred thy hand hath rendered them in my eyes."

Then said Dorcas: "It was a labor of love, Marcellus, because I love the word; and also because it was for thee. I have made other copies beside this, also, of these books, and of all the Epistles, and of the Revelation; and when I did copy the Medea for the Vice-Prefect Varus, one day I brought hither the first skin of those parchments, and did write thereon an illuminated initial letter, such as thou seest in thy Gospels here, and Varus when he saw it was much gratified and said to me: 'Child, it is beautiful! Who taught

thee that?' And I did laugh, but did not answer him."

Then said Marcellus: "Have ye other sacred books? Do they contain more full accounts of Jesus? Or is all that He taught and did, the whole of His system, fully set forth in the simple and beautiful parchment I have read?"

Then said Epaphras: "There is nothing in Christianity that must be believed or done that is not fully taught in the Four Gospels and the Acts. True, we have the sacred writings of the Jews, beginning with the Mosaic accounts of the creation, which trace the descent of Abraham from Adam, and which, also, contain the whole of the national, social and religious history of the Jews for centuries before the foundations of Rome were begun. But the whole of this law and prophecy was, as a school-master, to lead us unto Christ, and was fulfilled in Him. We have, also, various letters of Paul, and others, written to the churches since the death of Jesus; but these Epistles relate chiefly to controversies between the Jews and the Christians, and between the Christians and the heathen, and the philosophers; and are, also, hortatory to the churches; and we have the Revelation of John, but the time is not yet come to fully understand his sayings. All the other sacred writings are useful only in proving, illustrating and enforcing, what the Four Gospels and the

Acts contain; and unless one should desire to educate himself to teach or to preach, I do not think it necessary or even profitable for him to read or study them. But wilt thou tell me, centurion, what thou thinkest of these books? What thine estimate of Christianity may be? What is it that the books teach thee?"

Then the centurion replied: "I fear thou wilt be disappointed at the meagerness and simplicity of the system, which is all that I am able to adduce from a short but earnest study of these five parchments; for the first thing that impressed itself upon my mind is the fact that the teaching of Jesus, unlike that of Greek and Roman philosophers and priests, is absolutely barren of dogmas and of doctrines. His appeals are made to, his proofs are drawn from, the heart and consciousness of every man, and not to and from dogmas and authority. And it seems to me that no sane man can deny the truth of anything which His teachings assume to be true; for He seems to me to know just what is in the human heart."

"That is the exact truth," said Epaphras. "No bishop could state the case with greater accuracy. Jesus teaches no dogmas, despises all philosophers, forms, customs and ceremonies, and deals directly with the heart and consciousness of each individual!"

"The second thing which impressed me most

powerfully, and I confess filled me with astonishment, is the fact that Jesus does not announce any new truth even of a spiritual character. The Jews must have known all that He taught. The rewards of faith, and the immortality of the soul, are assumed by Him to be well-known and generally accepted truths; only the Sadducees controverted this position. He offers Himself as the proper object of human faith, the Messiah in whom they believed, and whom they were expecting; and this claim that He was the Christ is all that seems to be new in His teachings."

"Thou hast rightly read the word," said Epaphras, "and thine estimate is good. What else hast thou learned?"

"I find," said Marcellus, "that this simple creed of faith in Christ has far less to do with Elysium or Hades—the condition of the soul after death—than with the temporal life and welfare of mankind. I have reckoned up some seventy-two parables spoken by Jesus, of which only two seem to refer to the future life, and all the others to the kingdom of heaven upon earth, which kingdom is plainly set forth as a democracy, in which equality and fraternity of all believers is secured by the denial of the right to bear arms, or to engage in war, by abolishing all serfdom and slavery, and by abolishing the right to acquire, hold or transmit private rights of property,

including in the word 'property,' not only estates, real and personal, but all offices, prerogatives and privileges, so that there may be equality, partnership, fellowship, among believers, and that the man who is most esteemed and loved may be the man who does the most good for others. And I understand that Jesus ordained monogamic marriage, and prohibited divorce, so that the family might be the basis for Christian civilization, which is the common church. But Jesus says that in all this He taught nothing new — only fulfilled the Jewish law and prophecies."

"Verily thou hast read the parchments with the spirit and the understanding, centurion! Thou hast grasped the very gospel of Christ in the fullness of its divine simplicity and purity! But is there aught else that thou hast learned?"

"Yea," answered Marcellus, "there is one other thing that seemeth, indeed, to be the very heart of the whole matter, of which I hesitate to speak — for it is somehow a most mysterious and sacred thing — it is that of which Christ talked with Nicodemus."

"Yea," cried the presbyter, "the Palingenesis — the new birth. Thou mayest believe, Marcellus — perhaps thou dost already believe — that Jesus is the Christ; thou mayest believe that His teachings in regard to war, in regard to personal liberty for all men and personal accountability, in

regard to property and in regard to marriage, are divinely true, surpassing all human laws, philanthropy and statesmanship — and yet not be a Christian! Of all these things thou mayest commune with thy friends, as thou has been accustomed to do with us; but one step beyond this is the Holy of Holies; one step beyond this bringeth thee, and every man, to the supreme question of human life, which only thou and thy Lord can settle. 'Wilt thou have the man Christ Jesus to reign over thee?' Here the mediation of an angel would be an impertinence to thee and to thy God; the intermeddling of presbyter, or of bishop, would be a blasphemy. No man can aid thee here. It is the voluntary and conscious rejection of Jesus, or else it is the voluntary, conscious and unreserved submission of thy will to the will of Christ, and that thing thou and He must settle as thou wilt. Thou hast no further need of me, my son. Farewell."

Then rose Epaphras up, and took his lamp, and quietly departed out of the chapel. But the maiden Dorcas slipped down upon her knees beside the youth, and clasped her yearning arms about him, and hid her sweet face in his breast, and his open hand lay on her shining hair.

There was no metaphysical haze, nor dreaminess, nor mystery, about it. Epaphras had set him face to face with the great question, and then

began in his own soul the terrible contest of which the souls of all men have been somehow, sometime, in some form or other, the everlasting battlefield.

He understood perfectly well just what it meant. There was no place for self-deception. Christ, he knew, could never be deceived. Either he could reject Jesus and go his own way, to gather all the blessings of the world; or he could submit himself to Jesus, go whithersoever he might order, and forfeit all. What must he do? He was young, intelligent, wealthy. He was a centurion already and was thoroughly accomplished in his profession of arms; he was of an old and honorable family; the Roman world was almost in his grasp; he could, by an act of the will alone, stifle the intangible sense of duty, silence the speechless voice of conscience and gratify all human lusts and ambitions as few men have ever had the opportunity to do; or he could turn his back upon all those material advantages, renounce his already important position in the empire, subject himself to the pity and contempt of his associates, and to the measureless scorn of the proud class to which he belonged, to enter upon a life of poverty, self-denial, esteemed to be infamous, full of toils and danger, leading, perhaps, to martyrdom. What must he do?

Epaphras was right. No mortal could give

him any aid; it was a business to be transacted between his soul and Christ.

The struggle grew more and more desperate every instant; his brows knitted, and his lips grew white, and his bosom heaved tempestuously with fierce agony and strife. Hour after hour the fearful contest shook him, soul and body. But the young girl would not leave him. Kneeling beside him, she suffered with him, and all her heart yearned over him; but hardly did either of them speak. Often prayed she for the Holy Spirit to descend upon him. Again she sat near him, with his hand in hers.

Finally the tempest passed away. In the depths of his own heart, freely, voluntarily, with a painfully distinct consciousness of all the consequences that might follow, he consecrated himself, soul and body, once for all, for life and death, for time and eternity, to Jesus Christ and His service; and a great calm, full of peace and joy, came over him. With a radiant smile upon his worn and haggard face, he said most simply: "It is all over, Dorcas; I will follow Jesus Christ."

Then the floodgates of long-restrained emotions were opened in her heart, and the young maiden laughed, and cried, and sang praises to her God, all in a breath, and she did kiss Marcellus over and over again, saying continually:

“Thank God for thee, Marcellus! Praise the Lord, oh, my soul! for His loving kindness — oh, how great! And His mercy endureth forever.”

CHAPTER XVIII

IN WHICH EUSEBIUS SHOWETH THE SWADDLING- BANDS OF CONSTANTINE

EUSEBIUS, who was the principal one among those who were nominated to go upon the embassy to Constantine, undertook the long journey to Lutetia with good hope, and right speedily accomplished it. The church statistics which he laid before the emperor filled him with astonishment, and at first with alarm, but his anxiety speedily changed into pleasure when he had been more fully informed of the doctrines and practices of the Christians. For he was so astute a politician "that the passive and unresisting obedience which bows under the yoke of authority or even of oppression appeared in the eyes of an absolute monarch the most conspicuous and useful of the evangelic virtues." For as the Christians were forbidden by their faith "to employ force even in defense of their religion, they would be still more criminal if they were tempted to shed the blood of their fellow-creatures in disputing the vain privileges or the sordid possessions of this transitory life." So that he had no fear

of their great numbers and opulent resources when he learned that the Christians, "Faithful to the doctrine of the Apostle who, in the reign of Nero, had preached the duty of unconditional submission during the first three centuries, had preserved their consciences pure and innocent of the guilt of secret conspiracy or of open rebellion. While they experienced the rigor of persecution they were never provoked either to meet their tyrants in the field or indignantly to withdraw themselves into some remote and sequestered corner of the world." So that Constantine's first emotion of alarm at the discovery of a body of men so numerous, so zealous and so thoroughly organized "that they constituted a distinct democracy, which was already governed by its own laws and officers, was possessed of a common treasure and was intimately connected through all its parts by the frequent assemblies of its bishops, to whose decrees their numerous and opulent congregations yielded implicit obedience," was entirely removed upon learning the tenets of their faith, which rendered them a valuable, but not a dangerous element, in the population of the empire. For the far-seeing Constantine at once perceived that there would always be soldiers enough unless all people should become Christians, and saw that if all became Christians there would be no need of soldiers, but that swords might be beaten into plowshares and

spears into pruning-hooks; and that while this change was in progress (if indeed it ever should occur) the resources of the empire would be kept increasing by the peaceful industry of the Christian communities.

"I must have," he said unto Eusebuis — "I must have the friendship of this great and wonderful community. On what terms can I obtain it?"

"I judge from the spirit of the council called to consider the matter," said Eusebius, "that it would be well-nigh impossible to induce them to bear arms in any cause; because by the teachings of Christ and by the practice of the church for three centuries they are forbidden to do so."

"Then," said Constantine, "the same superstition that forbids them to bear arms in my behalf ought also to prevent them from affording any assistance to Maxentius."

"Assuredly," answered Eusebius, "except that they pay taxes to the powers that be; to thine if they be under thy dominion; to Maxentius while he bears rule. If they could be induced to go to war at all they would recruit an army for thee. But for three centuries they have steadily refused to bear arms even in defense of the faith for which they do not hesitate to die."

"I must have this people," said Constantine. "I will have them. Thou mayest take back to

them my pledge that I will exempt all Christians from military service and leave them in full enjoyment of their own democratic institutions."

"Permit me to suggest," said Eusebius, "that thine imperial mandate go not quite so far. Let it be left as a matter of conscience to each individual; for there be many Christians who would serve if the church did not forbid it, and the clergy insist mightily upon liberty of conscience."

"So let it be," answered the emperor; "for in many things I prefer the system of these Christians to any that is known in history. Wouldst thou advise me to profess this faith, and join the church?"

"Nay," answered Eusebius. "They fully understand that no emperor can be a Christian without ceasing to be an emperor. The church is democracy, liberty, equality, fraternity. No bishop would baptize thee unless thou first resign thy scepter."

"Speak thou freely," said Constantine. "I desire to know thy very thoughts, without reserve."

"I think," answered the wise Eusebius, "that thou hast discovered the deepest political truth of this century, in holding that the best subjects for an absolute monarch are those who, like the Christians, will not bear arms at all—for such I perceive to be thy sentiment. But the Christians

hold other doctrines with equal tenacity and unswerving faith. They are opposed to slavery, and no Christian will own a slave. They utterly deny the right of the individual to acquire, hold, or transmit private property, and the church holds all in common for the good of all. They consider monogamic marriage a sacrament of religion; deny the lawfulness of divorce, and constitute the family the basis of society, and the church the only superstructure that Christians can lawfully aid in erecting thereon. Any profession of faith that is not followed by the practice of these social and political principles they would believe to be hypocritical, and would regard with loathing and contempt. So that it is impossible for Augustus to conform his life to these fundamental laws of the Kingdom of Heaven."

"But," exclaimed Constantine, "I must have this people! And, by Jupiter Ammon, I will have them!"

Then he sprang from his seat and paced the room with rapid strides until he had regained his equanimity. Then he sat down in front of Eusebius and fixed his splendid eyes upon him with a gaze as calm and searching as if he sought to read his very soul, and presently he said: "Art thou a Christian?"

And the mellifluous voice of Eusebius answered in placid, liquid tones:

"I am a bishop of the church of Christ."

"Is that the highest rank known to the Christian democracy?"

"Yea. We have no apostles now, and all bishops possess equal authority — the power and influence exercised by them depending only upon the respective character of the individual and the locality, numbers, and opulence of his church."

Then said Constantine, musingly: "The high-priest of the Sanhedrim at Jerusalem; the chief of the Order of the Druids in Britain; the Flamen of Jupiter, Pontifex Maximus at Rome; the bishops of the church of Christ — they are all men, and all alike." And then he continued in a lower tone: "If thou canst bring the Christian communities over to me, what good thing dost thou desire for thyself? Speak boldly, without lying or equivocation! I will have no evasion, or crookedness in any man with whom I talk."

"I should expect to receive," said Eusebius, placidly, "and think that I would deserve, the confidence and favor of the greatest emperor that hath ever governed Rome."

Then the two most able men of that century gazed for a moment into each other's eyes, and understood each other perfectly.

"Now," said Constantine, "knowing the Christians thoroughly, as thou dost, I desire thee to advise me carefully how I may bind this people

to my throne. What is thy counsel — for thou art not a fool, and thou hast already sifted this whole matter clean? ”

Eusebius made a very singular reply, only saying:

“Hast thou ever read ‘The Acts of the Apostles’? ”

An angry frown contracted the brow of Constantine for a moment, but it passed away, and he replied:

“No! But why dost thou ask a question so impertinent to the matter in hand? ”

Then said Eusebius, still apparently thinking of something foreign to the subject of their thoughts: “It may be hard for thee to realize the truth, but the truth is, that from the days of Pontius Pilate until now, the church of Christ, by the power of faith, hath been accustomed to unstop the ears of the deaf, cure the lame and the halt, restore sight to the blind, and raise the dead, and to do many other thaumaturgical works, as the usual and proper evidence of the divinity of Jesus, and the right of the church to teach and to preach by His authority; and this thaumaturgical power is the secret of that splendid vitality which has enabled the church to live and to flourish, although all the resources of pagan power and civilization have been deployed against her from the very beginning. Thou wilt understand, there-

fore, that a miracle to a Christian does not seem to be any strange or incredible thing. In fact, I have witnessed at least hundreds, and nearly all Christians have seen them. If thou wilt carefully read the Acts of the Apostles to-night, and especially the dramatic and beautiful account of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, I will wait upon thee in the morning to offer thee one single comment upon that scripture."

"Thou mayest go," said Constantine, "with the assurance that I will read the book with care."

When, on the next morning, Eusebius came before the Emperor, Constantine immediately spoke as follows: "The conversion of Saul of Tarsus was a wonderful event. I have read the whole parchment thrice, and that particular passage oftener still. I tell thee, bishop, that the internal evidences of its verity are so irresistible that I believe the story to be true. In fact, I would do anything to be a Christian, except to resign the Roman Empire — that I will not do. Now what is the comment on this scripture?"

Eusebius gazed upon the emperor, and saw that Constantine spoke in very sincerity and truth, and murmured to himself: "Many men have lost their souls for less!"

But to the emperor he said: "I have been praying that God might commission thee to protect His church, and that He might confirm thy

mission by some sign as significant and sublime as that which Paul offered as evidence of his own apostleship. I desire of thee permission to return straightway to Rome. If any authentic information should shortly follow me that the event for which I prayed had really come to pass, I would thank God and take courage, and might persuade the church to accept thee as their emperor, appointed by Heaven to bring peace unto the long persecuted saints, even although thou thyself should not become a Christian but remain the emperor. Have I thy permission to return at once to Rome?"

"Yea; go thou quickly," said Constantine, with eagerness. "The daimon tells me that the thing thou hast desired of Heaven shall certainly occur! I have, indeed, a strong assuring faith that it will happen! Hasten thou to Rome."

And so, furthered by Constantine by every aid that imperial power could command up to the confines of Italy, Eusebius returned to Rome. Upon the occasion of the former council this adroit and unscrupulous man had carefully ascertained and preserved the name and address of every bishop and presbyter who had favored his own views, and being afraid to submit the question of adopting the policy upon which his own heart was set to a council in which the stern, incorruptible Christian integrity of Epaphras and

of many like him would confront, expose and overwhelm the plausible sophisms by which he had deceived even himself, he chose rather to confer privily with those who had been inclined to favor his own views. Therefore, both at Rome and elsewhere, he solicited an interview with such as could conveniently assemble at each place, and obtained their signatures, knowing that Constantine would not understand the differences between a document authenticated by their individual names and a decree passed by the common consent in regular council.

The points upon which Eusebius insisted in these small but numerous assemblies, with consummate address, were about as follows: That upon further conference with Constantine he had found him to be far more favorably inclined to Christianity than he had aforesaid believed or represented; that the emperor would not require any Christian to bear arms, but would leave it to the conscience of each one to determine for himself whether he might do so or not — a “liberty of conscience” upon which the church had always insisted; that no alliance between the church and the emperor was desired, or even proposed, but that the emperor only desired the prayers of the Christians, their loyalty and friendship, the payment of customary taxes — which as citizens they had paid even to Nero and Diocletian — and

wished to give them legal protection, if the church would accept it; that within the limits of their own community the Christians might maintain their laws and customs unimpaired; and that if the civil war, in which he was about to engage, should be protracted beyond one campaign, they must furnish money or supplies, or both.

Eusebius urged vehemently that these things did not constitute any alliance with the emperor, and were not inconsistent with Christianity, and in this plausible statement of the case he soon found able coadjutors to divide the work with him, and prosecute the business in many quarters simultaneously. To all of them he furnished an answer to the one fatal objection "that any consensus between the church and the empire must necessarily shear the Christians clear of all thaumaturgical powers which were appurtenant only to the pure democracy of Christ, wherein they must of necessity be exercised only for the common good, and could never be used to build up an earthly kingdom, or a secularized church," as follows: That it must be candidly admitted that the loss of thaumaturgical power would in all probability follow the acceptance of the imperial protection; but that these powers were given only to enable the church to maintain herself against a world *hostile* to the claims of Christianity; that spiritual truth would be preserved unimpaired, and

that the miracles which had been continuously wrought for three centuries would be sufficient evermore to demonstrate the gospel truth; that there could be no necessity for continuous miraculous aid to insure the triumph of the church, backed by the Roman Empire, the mistress of the world; and that, finally, if a time should ever arrive in the history of the church when it might become necessary to resort to thaumaturgy to secure her triumph, the church could do so by cutting loose from all secular governments and reorganizing her communities on the primitive foundation of communism and faith.

By these and many more such specious arguments Eusebius secured a great number of signatures of bishops and presbyters to a parchment promising what Constantine desired. And this was made the more easy by an extraordinary rumor that became current among the Christians both at Rome and elsewhere. It was affirmed that the Emperor Constantine, marching at the head of his army at midday, had seen a miraculous cross in the heavens shining above the brightness of the sun and had seen an inscription thereon in the Greek language: "In this sign conquer;" it was furthermore given out that in a vision of the night, Christ or an angel, had appeared unto the emperor, and had directed him to take for a standard a cross bearing his own effigy, and the words

which he had beheld upon that cross seen by him in heaven, and to march against Maxentius and all his enemies with the assurance of success; and that he must be the Protector of the Church of Jesus Christ. It was further given out that the vision had directed him to call his standard by a miraculous name, *Labarum*, a word before unknown to the human race, and having no root or origin in any earthly language. It was furthermore given out that although the whole army had seen the celestial sign, Constantine (because of the heathen) desired the vision and the words to be kept secret from all except the Christians.

To those who made careful inquiry, what seemed to be the main fact, the luminous appearance above the midday sun, was proved by incontestable and overwhelming testimony; and Eusebius and those who acted with him used this strange story with wonderful success in bringing still others over to their own views; and many urged that a council be summoned to consider the whole matter again. But this Eusebius vehemently opposed, saying that it was not necessary, and that Constantine did not require their action to be taken in council, being satisfied with their signatures and the revelation vouchsafed to him constituting him the Defender of the Faith. But when these things came to the knowledge of Epaphras and those who agreed with him in sentiment, they vigorously endeavored

to secure the calling of a council, but their action had been forestalled by Eusebius; and when they found that they could not obtain their desires in this regard, they issued a pastoral letter to all of the churches, warning them against the course pursued by Eusebius. And this letter began with the declaration that "Eusebius had forestalled the summoning of a council, because he well knew that whenever the common church might meet to deliberate upon the matter the Holy Ghost would come upon them, and would guide them into all truth — which fact Eusebius feared."

The letter also said, "the day that ye conclude this sacrilegious bargain miracles will cease; or will henceforth occur only sporadically, beyond any control or influence of the church, and in such seemingly accidental ways as to render them no longer available as evidence of the divinity of Jesus. Then ye will have nothing left of Christ's gospel except its spiritual truth, and Christianity will speedily become a mere ecclesiasticism as much as Judaism or paganism — a secularized church using the religious sentiment of mankind to maintain political despotisms, ready to give the pretended sanction of our Lord to war, slavery, Mammon-worship and every other crime, fraud and injustice that the empire may establish by some felon formula of law."

And the letter said, "and there will grow up an

ecclesiasticism in which the so-called ministers of Christ shall preach the gospel for money, and there shall be among them envy, jealousy, hatred, strife, ambition and selfishness, such as even the heathen permit not in their temples;" and the letter also said: "The church so constituted shall be the master of ceremonies for countless forms, doctrines and secular authority, condemned by Jesus, and shall lose the power of godliness and the beauty of truth, even as the Eusebians themselves admit that thaumaturgy shall fade away;" and the letter concluded as follows: "Brethren, this is to sell our Lord; it is to destroy His holy common church; it is to establish mere Pharisaism upon the ruins of forsaken and forgotten Christianity; it is to set up the Anti-Christ."

And this letter having been read by many, some of them who had signed went to Eusebius to erase their signatures from the parchment; to whom he answered: "The parchment hath already been sent and is far upon the way to the emperor."

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CHAPTER XIX

IN WHICH THERE IS A DEATH AND ALSO A MARRIAGE

WHILE this business was transacting secretly, and before Eusebius had procured the signatures to the parchment which he sent to Constantine, after the centurion Marcellus had been baptized by Epaphras in the chapel in the catacombs, and had partaken of the communion in one of those pleasant Sabbath-day conferences which had long been customary between himself, Dorcas and Epaphras, the young man spake thus: "I am, indeed, very happy, Father Epaphras, in the faith of Christ; but I feel bound in my conscience to abandon the military service of the empire, and to publicly declare my faith in Jesus; nor can I have perfect peace until this shall have been done."

"If thou do this thing publicly," said Epaphras, "the Romans will put thee to death, both because thou art a Christian, and also because thou forsakest the military life without the consent of the emperor. Nevertheless, Marcellus, consider the matter well, and follow thou the teachings of thine own conscience."

And the centurion said: "I have considered it very fully. I know that the duties of an officer in the army of the empire and the duties of a Christian are irreconcilable. I have resolved upon this course, and will pursue it. I cannot do otherwise."

"A life bought by the sacrifice of one's conscience is purchased at too dear a price," said Epaphras. "The *Libellatici* and the *Thurificati*, who have purchased of the heathen priests or magistrates false certificates that they had sacrificed to the pagan gods, when it was not true that they had done so, in order to escape the consequences of having been discovered to be Christians, have no peace, although forgiven by the church."

"I am resolved," said Marcellus, "and I have mentioned the matter to thee chiefly because if I be slain therefor, perhaps the Lord might grant the Anastasis, which I do desire exceedingly, if it be His will."

"The church shall pray for thee in that behalf," said Epaphras. "Thou understandest that we do not know what may be the will of God concerning thee!"

"I go hence," said Marcellus, "to carry out my purpose. If I perish, I perish. Fare thee well!"

Then the presbyter embraced him and kissed

him on his forehead, saying: "Farewell, my son! The peace of God be and abide with thee!"

And after a tender leave-taking of Dorcas, the centurion, who had learned the way to and from the chapel by repeated visits, departed upon his dangerous mission.

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The next evening, when the legion to which he belonged was mustered for customary exercise, which had recently become frequent and onerous because of the impending war with Constantine, in the view of the legion and of a crowd that had assembled to watch their evolutions, the centurion deliberately left the head of his century and advanced to the legionary, who turned fiercely upon him and cried out:

"Why hast thou left thy post? What dost thou here?"

Then Marcellus took off his belt, and his arms, and the insignia of his office, and laid them down at the feet of the legionary, and he said in a loud voice:

"Know thou that I have become a Christian, whom conscience permitteth not to bear arms, and I do here resign my command, refuse to serve longer, and will follow no king but Jesus Christ henceforth."

But the legionary, drawing his sword, cried out:
"I care not for thy conscience, nor for thy

Christ, but for military order and obedience; and if thou dost not instantly resume thine arms, and return straight to thy proper place, I will smite thee dead with mine own hand."

Marcellus crossed his arms upon his breast, and, gazing upon the legionary, said:

"For conscience' sake I will not obey thee. Strike thou home!"

And thereupon the legionary thrust his sword through Marcellus' bosom so that the point thereof came out behind his back, and the young centurion sank down upon his knees, and then fell at full length upon the ground.

And the legionary set his foot upon the breast of Marcellus, and pulled and withdrew his two-edged sword, and holding it aloft did cry aloud, saying:

"So may all traitors and all Christians die!"

At the order of the legionary, the soldiers marched past the centurion's body as it lay prone upon the ground. Then four men were told off to bear it away from the Campus Martius and lay it where it would not obstruct the maneuvers, which were continued as though no such terrible thing had happened, while a messenger was dispatched to the Vice-Prefect Varus bearing the news of his son's treason and summary execution at the hands of the legionary.

But certain men among those who stood around,

presently came forward, raised up his body, and, having brought a litter, no one preventing them, they placed the body thereon, and they carried it to the chapel in the catacombs, wherein were many awaiting the return of Epaphras and others who had gone to mingle with the crowd about the Campus Martius, and to observe the action of Marcellus, and what might come of it.

And Dorcas also was with them there, and at the selfsame instant the legionary smote the young man she felt as if a sword had pierced her own heart also, but she ceased not to pray, and to say: "Surely the Lord will restore him to us!"

And when those that brought in the corpse had laid it upon the long table in the sight of all, Epaphras, the presbyter, prayed mightily to God that He would grant the Anastasis for Marcellus, and all the people answered, "Amen!"

And Epaphras, coming round to the table, took the hand of Marcellus in his own, saying in a loud voice: "Brother, if it be the will of God concerning thee, in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, arise and live!"

And the young man arose and stood upon his feet, praising the Lord. And straightway he clasped unto his bosom the maiden Dorcas, and they did talk with each other briefly, and they did call the presbyter Epaphras to come unto them, and thereupon the presbyter did call the rejoicing

congregation to order, and when they were seated he said:

“Marcellus and Dorcas desire to be united in matrimony according to God’s holy ordinance. Come ye forward!”

And the twain came forward, hand in hand, and Epaphras saith: “Do ye each take each other for husband and wife, of your own free will and choice, to dwell together in the holy estate of Christian marriage, according to the commands of our Lord Jesus Christ, as in His Gospel is set forth?” And both of them answered, “We do.” Then saith Epaphras: “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, I declare ye twain to be one flesh. Whom, therefore, God hath joined together let no man put asunder.” And they both answered, “Amen!” and all the people said, “Amen!” And Marcellus put his arms around Dorcas’ neck and did kiss her, and did say with great content, “Thou art my wife!” and she did look upon him with beaming countenance and did say, “Thou art my husband!”

And the congregation were glad and did rejoice, and when they all were gone Dorcas took up her lamp and said: “Come, husband mine, and I will show to thee the home in which I have dwelt so long.” And hand in hand the twain departed out of the chapel.

CHAPTER XX

FINIS

NOW, the Emperor Constantine in due time received the parchment which Eusebius sent to him, signed by many bishops and presbyters, and he read the same with joy; and immediately he put his legions upon the march to Rome, bearing the cruciform standards which they called Labarums. After twice defeating the armies which Maxentius led forth to dispute the passage of the Alps, on the 27th day of October, A.D. 312, his forces were cantoned at Saxa Rubra, and upon the next day he attacked the army of the Emperor Maxentius, then drawn up in battle order at the Fabricus Bridge, nine miles from Rome, and defeated that army with great slaughter. And the Emperor Maxentius did attempt to swim his horse across the Tiber and so escape back into Rome, but he was drowned there in the river; and there was no more of that war, and Constantine was at once recognized as Emperor of Italy, as well as of the west, and as Augustus.

But after the compact which Eusebius had prepared to be signed by the presbyters and bishops had received their signatures and had been de-

livered to faithful messengers to be conveyed to the Emperor Constantine, one whom Maxentius, by his magistrates, had ordered to be beheaded, had sent earnest requests to the Presbyter Epaphras and to the church that they would beseech God in his behalf that the Anastasis might be granted unto him; and they conveyed the body to the chapel in the catacombs, and did pray mightily as aforetime, but God would not raise him up. And likewise some that were ill besought the prayers of the church, by which aforetime many were healed, and God answered not their prayers. And the deaf came to be relieved, and the blind to have their sight restored, but no miracle occurred in that chapel after the resurrection of Marcellus. And Epaphras was sorely grieved and his church. And when they found that God no more regarded them Epaphras preached unto them often that this "came from the alliance made with Constantine; and they all saw that thaumaturgy, which had for three hundred years been the glory and defense of Christianity, had indeed departed from the church and from the world."

And often Epaphras considered with them whether they should not, one and all, leave Rome and the Roman Empire and even journey unto the Isle of Man, and there found for themselves and their children a community unsecularized by an alliance with any human government. And

they did agree to keep up their services in the chapel every Seventh day, and to wait yet a little longer, if by chance the Lord would put into the hearts of those men to repent of their sin, and come again unto the Kingdom of Heaven. But, notwithstanding, they made all necessary preparations to depart as soon as it should become certain that the secularization of the church would progress to a hopeless condition.

And Constantine left Rome and journeyed to Milan and established his throne in that city; and about April, of the year 313, did the Emperor Constantine issue to the Roman people "The Edict of Milan," which was as follows:

¹"Wherefore, as I, Constantine Augustus, came under favorable auspices to Milan, and took under consideration all affairs that pertained to the public benefit and welfare, these things among the rest appeared to us to be most advantageous and profitable to all. We have resolved among the first things to ordain those matters by which the reverence and worship to the Deity might be exhibited. That is, how we may grant likewise to the Christians, and to all, the free choice to follow that mode of worship which they may wish: that whatsoever divinity and celestial power may exist may be propitious to us and to all that live under our government. Therefore we have decreed the following ordinance as our will with a salutary and most correct intention, that no free-

¹ From Eusebius Eccles. Hist.: B. x. i. c. 5.

dom at all shall be refused to the Christians, to follow or keep their observances or worship. . . . And this we further decree with respect to the Christians, that the places in which they were formerly accustomed to assemble, concerning which also we formerly wrote to you faithfully in a different form, that if any person have purchased these, either from our treasury or from any other one, these shall restore them to the Christians, without money and without demanding any price, without any superadded value or augmentation, without delay or hesitancy, and if any have happened to receive these places as presents that they shall restore them¹ as soon as possible to the Christians, so that if either those that purchased or those that received them as presents have anything to request of our munificence, they may go to the provincial governor as the judge, that provision may also be made for them by our clemency. All of which it will be necessary to be delivered up *to the body of Christians* by your care without any delay. And since the Christians themselves are known to have had *not only those places where they were accustomed to meet*, but other places also *belonging not to individuals among them, but to the right of the whole body of Christians*, you will also command all these, by virtue of the law before mentioned, without any hesitancy, *to be restored to these same Christians*, that is, *to their body and to each conventicle respectively*. The aforesaid consideration, to wit, being observed; namely, that they who, as we have said, restore them without valuation and price may expect their indemnity from our munificence and liberality."

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And Constantine likewise issued another decree, in which he said:

“Whence it is our will, that when thou shalt receive this epistle, if any of those things belonging to the common church of the Christians in the several cities or other places are now possessed either by the decurions or any others, these thou shalt cause immediately to be restored to their churches. . . . Make all haste to restore as soon as possible all that belongs to the church, whether *gardens, houses, or anything else.*”

And Constantine also wrote to Cæcilianus, Bishop of Carthage:

“As we have determined that, in all the provinces of Africa, Numidia, and Mauritania something should be granted to certain ministers of the legitimate and most holy common religion to defray their expenses, I have given letters to Ursus, the most illustrious Lieutenant-Governor of Africa, and have communicated to him that he shall provide to pay to your authority three thousand folles. After you shall have obtained this sum, you are to order these moneys to be distributed among the aforesaid ministers, according to the abstract addressed to thee from Hosius. But if thou shalt learn, perhaps, that anything shall be wanting to complete this my purpose with regard to all, *thou art authorized, without delay, to make demands for whatever thou mayest ascertain to be necessary* from Heraclides, the procurator of our possessions, and I have also commanded him when present, that if thy authority should demand any moneys of him, *he should*

see that it should be paid without delay. And, as I ascertained that some men, who are of no settled mind, wished to divert the people from the most holy Catholic Church by a certain pernicious adulteration, I wish thee to understand that I have given, both to the Proconsul Anulinus, and to Patricius, Vicar-general of the Prefect, that among all the rest, they should particularly pay the necessary attention to this, *nor should by any means tolerate that this should be overlooked.* Wherefore, if thou seest any of these men persevering in this madness, thou shalt, without any hesitancy, *proceed to the aforesaid judges,* and report it to them, *that they may animadvert upon them,* as I commanded them when present.”

Wherefore, Epaphras plainly perceived that the whole Christian constitution of the common church was subverted, and a state religion or ecclesiasticism substituted for it.

And when the Presbyter Epaphras had read this Edict of Milan, and when he had learned that the Emperor Constantine had caused to be raised, in the midst of Rome, a statue of himself, bearing a cross in its right hand, with an inscription which referred the victory of its arms and the deliverance of Rome to the virtue of that salutary sign, the true symbol of force and courage; and had learned that “the same symbol sanctified the arms of the soldiers of Constantine; that the cross glittered on their helmets, was engraved on their shields, was interwoven in their banners; and that

the consecrated emblems which adorned the person of the emperor himself were distinguished only by richer materials and more exquisite workmanship;" when he learned that Constantine, at the same time, issued two edicts, "one of which enjoined the solemn observance of Sunday" (which he therein denominated the "Day of the Sun," in order not to offend the pagans), and the other of which "directed the regular consultation of the *Aruspices*;" when he saw that Constantine enriched the pagan temples; placed the figures and attributes of Jupiter, Apollo, Mars, and Hercules, upon the money issued from his mint; made a solemn apotheosis of his father, Constantius; and in all respects, attempted to hold fast to the heathen with one hand, and to the church with the other, manifestly designing, and, to a large extent accomplishing, the union of these two systems; and when he saw the church exalting the character, and fawning and flattering the greatness and goodness of this man, who still wore the imperial purple and had never even been baptized, he informed his own faithful people thereof, who had already agreed that, if that thorough secularization of the church which he had foreboded should follow the union of church and state, they would leave Italy with him, and remove into some distant land beyond the confines of the Roman Empire, and there seek to maintain a community for them-

selves and their children, in which the forms and doctrine of the democracy of Christ should be fully established; and in the month of June, in the year 313, having completed all their preparations for entering upon their long journey to the far North, they met together to hold divine service, for the last time, in their loved chapel in the catacombs; and at the conclusion thereof, with streaming eyes and aching heart, the Presbyter Epaphras said unto them: "Let us arise and go hence!" and he took his lamp in his hand and sadly moved away; and Marcellus and Dorcas followed next after him; and then, in slow and solemn procession, bearing their lamps in their hands through the long galleries, came the sorrowful but faithful congregation.

And likewise other faithful presbyters and bishops and their people, who, also, refused to betray their Lord by adopting the Roman laws which sanctioned war, and slavery, and Mammon-worship in the matter of private ownerships of property, segregated themselves into little communities in Italy, Hispania, Gaul and Germany, seeking to maintain for themselves and their children the democracy of Christ's common church; and abbeys and monasteries sprang up out of these communities. But in the lapse of time the secularized church became a human government, and forced them also to come under their ecclesiastical

laws; and the church departed more and more from the fundamental laws of primitive Christianity, conformed more and more unto the world, and finally became that which we now see, an ornate and costly ecclesiasticism that despises the poor, perverts the Gospel, and worships Mammon in the name of the Son of the carpenter — an inverted Christianity that would feel itself to be insulted if one should call it Anti-Christ.

* *

But Epaphras, followed by his whole congregation — men, women, and children, from the gray grandsire to the babe in arms — passed through Rome by the Appian Way, until they reached the Temple of Vesta, and thence along the banks of the Tiber, until they came to the Ælian Bridge, in solemn procession, with wagons and chariots drawing their household goods, and grain for seed, and calves, and lambs, goats, and poultry, and all iron implements of agriculture and of mechanics. And they ended the first day's journey on that spot of ground which was afterward covered by the great temple of St. Peter (whom after ages confounded with a Galilean of the same name, who was a Christian), and at night, under the open heavens, Epaphras held the last Christian church service that was ever witnessed in the City of the Cæsars.

And day after day they pursued their journey, and night after night their songs and prayers ascended unto heaven.

And so they went through Italy, and crossed the Alps, and journeyed into Gaul, until, about the close of the first month, they reached Lutetia, and here for a short space they tarried, building and buying ships wherewith to continue their exodus down the river and over the sea.

And night after night came the deacons, saying unto Epaphras:

“Father, whither dost thou lead us?”

And night after night Epaphras answered, saying:

“Beyond the limits of the Roman Empire unto some land wherein we may serve the Lord.”

And the boats were completed, the people embarked, with their implements of agriculture, their personal property, their mechanics’ tools, their calves, and sheep, and goats, and their poultry, and, with the flowing river, they wandered to the sea.

And at last the vast expanse of waters lay outspread before them, and the deacons came to Epaphras, saying:

“Father, whither dost thou lead us now?” for the ships were small and the waters great.

And Epaphras said again:

“Beyond the limits of the Roman Empire unto

some land wherein we may serve the Lord. Cast off! Hoist sail! Trust God!"

And slowly the ships drove over against the coast of Britain, and they coasted westerly until they came upon a long peninsula trending southwardly, and they doubled that point, and the sea spread out before them.

And afterward they coasted northwardly, until they passed the wall of Severus, that marked the extreme limits of the Roman power, and the people of that land refused to receive them or to permit them to land upon their shores.

Then came the deacons, distressfully, and said unto Epaphras:

"Father, whither dost thou lead us now?"

The presbyter stood up and prayed, and afterward he answered them, saying:

"Whithersoever the Lord shall guide us. Cast off! Hoist sail!"

A wind from the west drove off the ships from that inhospitable coast. And days and nights they were on the deep, when suddenly a land appeared before them. There was a long, low line of fertile soil, and abrupt mountains, and numerous sparkling rivers, and a mighty sweep of forests; and the land was beautiful. Then cried Epaphras from the foremost ship: "It is a virgin land, where Rome's imperial eagles never flew! Behold our pleasant home!"

And they made land safely; and they disembarked, and found no man, but deer, and quail, and partridges, and grouse, and abundant fish.

And first of all they unloaded the ships, and by the request of Epaphras they brake every boat in pieces; and their camp was pitched far inland; and they began to build cottages and to prepare the ground for seed.

Then went Epaphras, and with his own hand he cut a stone from the mountain, and he fashioned it with tools, and drew it unto a convenient place; and he called them all to look upon it; and they said unto him: "What is that, Epaphras?"

And he said: "I lay here the corner-stone of a Christian church; who will build thereon?"

And straightway every able man quarried a stone and brought it thither, and the church grew from day to day.

And their lambs, and kids, and calves, and poultry grew to flocks and herds.

And they set a watch upon the loftiest peak of the mountain night and day, and as often as any ship appeared in the offing the man Epaphras prayed unto God, and a mist came up out of the sea and covered all the island, so that no ship could find haven or land thereon.

They had a church, and a school; and held all things in common except wives, even as Jesus commanded; and they prospered in all things, serving

God in the beauty of holiness; until the man Epaphras grew old and died, having enjoined upon them that they should build no ships, and should pray for the mists to rise whenever ships might come in sight, unless they should be wrecked or in distress.

And the people elected Marcellus to be presbyter; and he followed in the way of Epaphras; and the people builded no ships; and the presbyter raised the mists to hide the island when any ships hove in sight; and the people were happy, prosperous and free.

But the presbyter Marcellus grew old and died, and Dorcas with him; and others succeeded him in the sacred office, until, about the year 400 came in new generations of men that forsook the tradition of their fathers, and permitted ships to land upon the island, and did not pray that God would send the mist to hide it; and more and more they held intercourse with ships of Britain and of Rome; and in the year 412 they had their presbyter converted into a bishop, and sent him unto the Ecumenical Council at Arles; and he returned with a new system that prevailed throughout the Roman Empire; and they more and more abandoned the customs of their fathers; and more and more they conformed unto the imperial laws concerning war, slavery and private property-rights; and thaumaturgy failed from among them; and

the church was received into Communion with the ecclesiastical system established by Constantine, and secularized through and through.

Then the Kingdom of Heaven ceased everywhere on earth, and the last of the primitive churches forsook Christ, and conformed unto the world.

When shall His kingdom again come in very truth upon the Earth?

